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THE YOUNG PHYSICIAN

BY

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

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To

THOMAS BRETT YOUNG, M.D.

WITH THE LOVE AND ADMIRATION
OF HIS SON

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BOOK I

The green trees, when I saw them first through one of the gates transported and ravished me; their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap and almost mad with ecstasy,—they were such strange and wonderful things. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars,—and all the world was mine,—and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it.

THOMAS TRAHERNE.

CHAPTER I

MURDERER'S CROSS

I

Above and beyond the zone of villas, some still white with newly-mixed mortar and the latest unadorned by more than twelve-foot tendrils of ampelopsis or rambling roses, the downs bent their bow to the sky. The horizon loomed so smooth and vast that the plantations of pine and beech which fringed the summits were powerless to break the nobility and purpose of its contour, etched gray-black against the hem of a thunder-cloud that was of the colour of ink. Between the banks a chalk road climbed: an aspiring road, felted in the trodden parts with dust but cross-veined with flinty gutters through which rain poured, like London milk, in stormy weather. A smell of hot earth was in the air. The turf at the wayside was parched and slippery, so that Edwin Ingleby, plodding up the slope, was forced to keep to the white roadway by the slipperiness of his boot-leather. A rather pitiful figure he made, this small boy in an Eton jacket, his waistcoat now unbuttoned and his school cap crumpled in his hot hands. He walked and ran straight upward, as though the devil were at his heels; sometimes looking behind him to see if there were any one in pursuit, sometimes wiping the sweat from his forehead with the crumpled cap.

A wagonette, drawn by a pair of horses and

burdened with trippers, jolted past him, throwing up a cloud of chalk-dust that made his eyes smart. Inside it swayed seven fat women in black bodices. The guard, who was sufficiently sober, in his own opinion, to ride on the step, was seen to laugh at the dust-smothered boy in the road.

'Poor lamb,' said the most motherly of the seven. 'Wouldn't 'e like a lift?'

'Gowing the hopposite way, mem,' said the guard. 'One of them College lads.'

''Ot 'e looks!' said the lady. 'Going to rine kets and dorgs, too.'

Edwin Ingleby rubbed the dust out of, or into, his eyes and went plugging on to the top of the ridge where the road dipped through a belt of beeches into the trough between two billows of down, losing itself within high banks of turf which bordered the plough-land, satiny now with bearded wheat and infinitely restful. He sat down on the bank with his feet in the gutter and began to mop up tears with the cap that he had lately used for mopping up sweat. All the time that he was crying, his heart was really full of almost incontinent valour, and that was why his tears made him angry. He began talking to himself:—

'Damned beast . . . great beefy beast. . . . If only the men could see what a damned beast he is. If Layton or some one could give him what he wants. Only no one could fight him. . . . He's got a weak heart, and it might kill him. I suppose that would be murder. . . .'

The word suddenly got a new significance. They called this road Murderer's Cross Road. High up in the grassy bank some pious person had cut a St Andrew's cross to commemorate

the murder of a postman who had been relieved of his bags and his life on a dark night a century ago. The college tradition said that it was haunted. Certainly it had an ugly sound. Murderer's Cross Road: a name to be whispered.

'Funny . . .' said Edwin. 'There's nothing very awful about it. I could understand a chap wanting to murder a chap. Quite easily. Only he might be sorry about it afterwards. I wouldn't mind murdering Griffin.'

He took a silver watch out of his pocket and laid it on the bank beside him. He could see that there was a full hour to spare before the bell in the water tower would jangle for the evening roll-call in the corner of the Quad; and so he lay back easily on the bank, stretching out his legs and arms in the form of the St Andrew's cross scored in the hedge a little farther on. Lying thus he could watch the shimmer on the bearded wheat. He had always loved the softness of this dip in the downs. He had loved it on winter mornings delicately dusted with rime, in November when flints lay like a bloom on the pale fallow, in March when the bloom turned green. Now the thunder-clouds had rolled away, rumbling, from the south, and a breath of cooler air was moving through the valley, throwing the surface of that green sea into wave-like motion; the waves shuddered faintly and the sound came to his ears as though re-echoed from the heavy woods which stood still in the heat, bounding the green ripples; and lying there, with his eyes half-closed, Edwin was already afloat, bearing westward with the set of the tide in the track of Cortes and Columbus and Pizarro and other adventurous voyagers. It was not really very difficult for him to forget

his tears. Although the fear of Griffin, that had first driven him afield, was a cruel obsession to which he was liable by night and day, he had long ago discovered that silence and solitude could make him free of any wonder which he chose to imagine. It had been like that even when he was quite little; he had always possessed the faculty of day-dreaming; and now that his imagination was beginning to flush at the sound of great names, and the pomps of chivalry and legend were slowly unfolding before him with their subtle suggestiveness unhampered by such knowledge of detail as would be alive to incongruities, his idleness became daily more precious. He suddenly remembered that Achaean assembly stirred by Agamemnon's words 'as when the West wind cometh to stir a deep cornfield with violent blast, and the ears bow down. . . .' And now the wind-moved wheat bent like a stricken army before knightly lances, and the roll of retreating thunder awoke echoes of the guns of Waterloo. . . .

II

It was nearly three years since Edwin had first seen Griffin, oddly enough on the very first day of his life at St Luke's. Mrs Ingleby had come down from the Midlands with him, a little anxious, for there were pitfalls in public school life (it was in ninety-five), but immensely proud of Edwin's entrance scholarship. They had crossed London together in a hansom, and on the smoky platform at Victoria, she had bidden him a good-bye which cost her some pangs, for the poor boy was half dead with train-sickness. Edwin was

her only child, and some smouldering ethic decreed that he must not be pampered, but when she raised her veil to kiss him, tears escaped beneath its rim. Those tears were very unsettling; they gave him a sudden glimpse of his mother in a new light; but he felt too ill even to watch her hurrying to the end of the platform. His head ached so violently in the sulphurous stationair that he wouldn't have minded much if some one, say his next-door neighbour in the train, a city clerk who smoked the most manly tobacco, had relieved him of the half-sovereign, the last gift of all, that he clutched mechanically in his left-hand trouser pocket—or if the porters, in the fine free way they have, had smashed all the jampots in the playbox so obtrusively white and new, with

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in black lettering on the lid.

The rest of that journey he had been too prostrate and lethargic to realise. Somewhere the shouting of a familiar word had bundled him out of his corner; a porter whom he had tipped fumblingly had bundled him into a cab which smelt of straw, and at last the martial-looking personage who received him at the grand entrance had conveyed him up a broad flight of stone stairs and along a corridor that echoed their two pairs of footsteps, to the housemaster's room, where, in an atmosphere of mellow honeydew, Mr Selby sat at his desk, trifling with a bath-list of the big dormitory. Ingleby sat at one end of a luxurious sofa, feeling very sick. It seemed as though he could never escape from the smell of tobacco. At the other end of the sofa sat another boy, perhaps

three years older than Edwin. He was tall for his age and inclined to be fat. His feet were small and shapely, and their smallness accentuated the heavy build of his shoulders, so that the whole boy seemed to taper downwards on the lines of a peg-top. He had a broad face, covered with freckles, regular but undistinguished features, and eyes, rather wide apart, of a peculiar cold and light blue. His hair was crisp and sandy; his whole get-up a little dandiacal within the limits of black and gray. He kept on fingering silver coins, that jingled together faintly in the depths of his pocket; perhaps he was counting them in the dark; perhaps he was merely fidgeting.

Mr Selby looked up from his bath-list.

'Well, Griffin, and what is your pleasure?'

'Letter from father, sir.'

A letter from father would need an answer. Mr Selby, although an expert in the tortuous psychology of parents, was a lazy man. He sighed as he opened it. 'H'm . . . No games? You don't look particularly ill, Griffin.'

'Doctor said I was growing too fast, sir . . . something about my heart.' Griffin's manners were irreproachable.

Mr Selby smiled.

'Very well, Griffin, very well. I will speak to the head master about you. And who is this miserable weed?'

There had been no break in the drawl of Mr Selby's voice with this change of subject, and Edwin did not hear, or heard without understanding. Griffin shook him by the shoulder. He lurched forward like a creature coming out of a cellar into daylight

'Ingleby, sir,' he said.

'Ingleby . . . Oh, yes. Let me see. You won't need to take the placing exam. to-morrow because of your scholarship papers. You'll be in the lower fourth. So Griffin will look after you. Do you hear, Griffin? I think Ingleby will be in your form. You are not overwhelmingly likely to get a move, are you?'

Griffin murmured 'No, sir.'

'Then you can conduct this Ingleby to D dormitory, Griffin.'

Griffin whispered 'Come on,' and walked ahead down the length of the corridor and another flight of stairs to a room of immense length, with white-washed walls, along which were ranged as many as thirty red-blanketed beds. Down the centre of the dormitory a trestled table of well-scoured wood held a double row of wash-hand basins and soap-dishes.

'There you are,' said Griffin, in a very off-hand way, 'You'd better bag a bed.'

'Which one is mine, please?' Edwin asked. His head was aching so furiously that he could have lain down on the floor.

'I've told you, you've got to bag one. Don't you hear? You'd better go and ask that man over there. Try the next one to his.'

That man over there was a stumpy boy with the face of a hyena and a shock of black hair, who scowled at Ingleby's approach.

'Here, get away. You can't come here. I don't want any new kids near me. Keep him to yourself, Griffin.'

Ingleby was thrown violently into Griffin's arms, and then buffeted backwards and forwards like a shuttlecock between them. This game proved to be such excellent fun that wherever

he sought a bed on which to lay his things it was continued by his immediate neighbours. He was greenly pale and beginning to cry when a tall, dark boy, wearing glasses, arrived and made straight for the group that surrounded him.

'Here's Layton,' whispered some one.

'What's this?' he asked. 'A new boy?—What's your name?'

'Ingleby.'

'What's the matter?'

'They won't let me find a bed.'

'Come along down this end, then.' He moved majestically to the end of the dormitory nearest to the door and pointed to a vacant bedstead. 'There you are,' he said. He was kindly without the least trace of unbending. Ingleby took him for a prefect; already he had received the canonisation of heroism. He stood and watched Edwin spread out his nightshirt on the bed. At this moment the climax of his migraine arrived. Edwin was sick.

Layton's lips curled. 'Dirty little skunk,' he said as he hurried away.

A slipper, cleverly aimed from the other end of the room, caught Ingleby full on his burning cheek. The pain seemed to blind him.

And a skunk, in spite of himself, he remained, for small boys are as persistently unintelligent as parrots in their memory for names. Ingleby's 'skunkhood' became a tradition that he never wholly lived down during his first years at St Luke's. In them he experienced all the inevitable qualms of homesickness, although even these were more tolerable than the physical qualms which had complicated his arrival, for they passed quickly in the excitement of a new life, the adoption

of new standards, the spring of new ambitions. It was a thousand times unfortunate that he should have made such a sensational début, that chance should have included such circumstances as Griffin and a sick-headache in his first day; for all that was instinct in the boy rebelled against the category in which he found himself placed, the definition of his status that had been hastily formulated by a few small boys, and almost tacitly accepted by the masters.

To begin with, he had very few of the attributes of the skunk. He was neither dirty nor undersized: indeed he had a nice instinct for personal cleanliness, and all the slim, balanced beauty of a young boy's figure. He was far from unintelligent —though this counts for little enough in the schedules of precedence at school. It amounted to this: he was not used to the company of other boys; he had never played games; he had made himself objectionable on his first night in the dormitory—and Layton had called him a skunk. Griffin saw to the rest, seconded by the lad with the hyena face, who bore the illustrious name of Douglas. Strangely enough no one but Ingleby seemed to have tapped the romance in the hyena-faced's name. Setting out to find any tokens of Chevy Chase beneath the black mop, he was caught staring in Hall, and as a proper retribution for such insolence, subjected to the pain and indignity of a 'tight six' with a gym shoe, his head wedged in two stocks of Mr Griffin's thighs. New boys of his own age, and smaller, seeing this exhibition, formed a very low estimate of Ingleby. They shuddered also at the knowledge that he had been heard to ask the difference between a drop-kick and a punt.

This isolation, except for purposes of chastisement, weighed heavily on Edwin. He didn't wish to be different from others, although he felt that his mind was somehow of a painfully foreign texture. He knew that things somehow struck him differently . . . but he was so far from taking this as a mark of superiority that he was heartily ashamed of it. His whole ambition was towards the normal; he tried vigorously to suppress imagination, humour, all the inconvenient things with which he had been cursed; to starve them, to destroy them. He became studious of the ways of normality. Griffin and the noble Douglas were handy exemplars; Layton, the head of the house, an unattainable ideal. Layton, indeed, was something of a variant; but Layton, by means of his slim skull's capacity for retaining facts and an ingratiating piety, had passed beyond the pale of everyday endeavour. Edwin longed to be normal, and they wouldn't let him. He cultivated assiduously the use of the fashionable slang; and that, of course, was easy. He whipped up an interest in outdoor games; played his very hardest in the ordinary house football, and even volunteered to take part in the Soccer games organised on fag-days for small boys by Mr Selby, who nursed a lazy grudge against the Rugby Code. 'The Miserable Weeds,' they were called, enshrining his favourite epithet. But though he plunged out of school every morning to practise place-kicking in the fields before dinner, Ingleby was not destined to shine in sport. His habit of dropping off to sleep between fitful bursts of brilliance almost caused him to be uprooted from Mr Selby's plantation of weeds. This didn't worry him much. because Soccer was not popular;

but after two trials in the house third, which the baleful Douglas captained, he was degraded to the scratch side known as *Small Boys* ; and even here the scrum extinguished a talent that might have shone in the three-quarter line.

And since he failed in every endeavour to attain normality, whether by devotion to games or by those attempts which he made to prove that he was neither 'coxy' nor 'pi,' by a retiring manner and a foul tongue, he began to crawl back into his shell, nursing a passionate hatred, not unmixed with envy, for all those people whom he couldn't hope to be like. And so, in a little time, this dangerous humiliation turned to a sort of pride. It pleased him to count himself their superior even when he was most downtrodden. His form master had recently been boring the class with a little dissertation on Marcus Aurelius. Edwin became a Stoic, spending his days in far corners of the box-room, munching a slowly dwindling store of biscuits. Once Griffin caught him with his locker door open and pinioned him against the benches while Douglas made free with his *Petits-Beurres* to the rest of the box-room. For such contingencies as this the Emperor's system of philosophy seemed hardly adequate.

Most of all he dreaded the dormitory; for here the abandonment of clothes laid him open to particularly painful forms of oppression; the shock and horror of bedclothes ragged just as he was falling off to sleep; the numbing swing of a pillow, the lancinating flick of wet towels; Oh ! —a hell of a life, only to be terminated by the arrival of Layton, who had the privilege of sitting up till eleven, with black rings round his spectacled eyes. He was reading for a scholarship at

Cambridge. Then Ingleby would really get off to sleep, or sometimes, if he were too excited, watch the moonlight, broken by the stone mullions of the windows, whiten the long washing-table and cast blue shadows so intense that they heightened the bareness of the dormitory; or else he would listen to the harsh breathing of Douglas, who slept with his mouth open, and wonder what all those heavy sleepers were dreaming of, or if they dreamed at all. And then his own magic casements were opened.

At St Luke's he had discovered the trick—quite a new thing for him—of historical dreaming. His form were busy with the age of the Stuarts, under the direction of a master named Leeming, a mild-eyed cleric, rather shy of boys and feverishly grateful whenever he sprung a response to his own enthusiasms.

Ingleby drank deep of the period's romance, and this heady wine coloured his dreams. He would dream sometimes of the tenanted oak of Boscobel, watching with agony the movements of the Roundhead searchers; sometimes he would stand elbowing in the crowd about that scaffold at Whitehall, when the martyr king stepped out. The man at his left hand had been eating garlic. Ha!—a Frenchman. One of those musketeers! . . . He would tremble with delight. He wished that he could tell Mr Leeming of his dreams, but they were far too precious to risk being bruised by laughter or unconcern. All night long this queer panoramic rubbish would go seething through his brain, until, at six-fifteen, one of the waiters swung a harsh bell outside the dormitory door and he would turn over, trying to piece together the thin stuff that its clangour had so suddenly

broken, until the *ten-bell* rang, and the rush for early school began. He grew to love the winter terms because the darkness lasted longer.

But he did write to his mother about it. Always on Sunday mornings the sergeant would come in with a letter from her, full of the strangely remote news of home; how the garden was looking, what Aunt Laura was doing, and how they talked of felling the elm-trees in the lane. Sometimes, with the lavishness of an angel, she would put a couple of penny stamps inside for his reply. The odd stamp would buy a stick of chocolate or a packet of nougat at the tuck shop. And in these letters she rose, quite unexpectedly, to the recitation of his dreams. 'How lovely it must be for you,' she wrote. 'When you come home for the holidays at Christmas we will read some of Scott's novels aloud—*Waverley* and *Nigel*, and that will give you something more to dream about.' He began to realise what he hadn't seen before: that his mother was really a wonderful playfellow—much better, when he came to think of it, than any of the boys. He would have so much to explain to her. . . . 'Oh, you dear, you are lovely!' he wrote in reply.

And then one day, that sneak Douglas, fooling about in the dormitory with Edwin's toothbrush, happened to see the words that were faintly printed on the ivory handle:—

INGLEBY, CHEMIST, HALESBY.

'Oho,' he said.

At breakfast, after a propitiatory but futile helping of jam from Edwin's pot, he broke the glad news to Griffin.

'Ingleby's father's a chemist, Griff.'

'Then that's why he's such a skunk, Duggy. Is it true, Ingleby?'

'Yes. He's a chemist.'

'Then he isn't a gentleman.'

'Of course he's a gentleman.'

'Not if he's in trade. They oughtn't to have sent you to school here. It's a bally shame.'

That same afternoon Edwin was poring over a letter at his desk in Big School. His mother always told him to keep her letters. 'Some day you may like to look at them,' she said. He was reading this letter for the tenth time to see if he could extract some last scrapings of the atmosphere of home which it had brought him.

'Who's that letter from? . . . Girl?' said Griffin rudely.

'A lady.'

'What!'

'My mother.'

'Christ! Your mother isn't a lady, or she wouldn't have married a chemist . . . or be *your* mother.'

And then Edwin jumped up, overturning the form on which he had been sitting, and lashed out at Griffin's face. He wanted to smash the freckled thing. He only caught the boy's cheek with the flat of his hand, and then, after a second of dazed wonder at his own achievement, he rushed out of Big School, across the Quad, and up that white, dust-felted road to the downs.

CHAPTER II

GOLDEN MEDIOCRITY

I

Of course he got his thrashing in return; but, in the end, he found himself the gainer by that unthinkable outburst. The incident had been noted, and there were those who relished the blow to Griffin's prestige, a blow which no recriminatory lickings could efface. Edwin assured himself that he had that day lighted such a candle in England as should never be put out. It seemed, indeed, as though the affair had revealed to some of his own classmates that intellectual superiority which they had overlooked before; and, in particular, it made the basis of a friendship between himself and one of his rivals, a boy named Widdup, who combined with a head for mathematics—Edwin's blank despair—a certain proficiency in games. Widdup disliked Griffin.

'Great beefy beast,' he said. 'If they'd make him play footer and sweat some of the fat off him he'd have been a bit quicker on you. He wasn't half waxy about it. He hates being laughed at. . . .'

And so, as the terms slipped by, St Luke's ceased to be a purgatory. Edwin contracted certain timid friendships—as this with Widdup—and adored a series of perfectly ordinary prefects. He shook down into his proper place in the scheme of things, and after that nobody took much notice of him. Even the Griffin-Douglas coalition, who

never forgave, troubled him very little. Certain outbursts of persecution he took as a matter of course; such was the teaching of history; but the ways of these two were now widely divergent from those in which he trod. The dormitory was the only place in which they inevitably met, for he had managed to move his seat in Hall some way from that of Griffin; and in chapel, the only other place they had in common, he was safe.

The friendship with Widdup notably ripened. They were both members of the same branch of the Natural History Society, the one that was labelled astronomical. The subject was unpopular, for its pursuit was nocturnal and made no exciting appeal to the hunting instinct of boys. The section met every fortnight in the room of one of the mathematical masters. And since they met at night, they managed to escape second Prep. Their president, Mr Heal, was a rather melancholy performer on the flute, and Edwin, generally contriving to turn up some minutes before the meeting began, would stand at the door listening to the innocent gentleman playing to himself unaccompanied folk-tunes that he had collected in the holidays. At the first sound of a door-knock Heal would unscrew his flute and pack it into a case lined with puce-coloured plush; but it seemed as though an afterglow of tenderness still lingered on his unusually dull features. As for astronomy, they never got much farther than the mere names of constellations and their figures, although Widdup often asked questions which almost tapped the mathematical master's subject. These adventures were discouraged, for Mr Heal had grown to hate mathematics. But they did learn to find their way about the paths

of the sky, and often, on frosty winter evenings, when the clear vault above the downs was like jet, Edwin and Widdup would walk up and down the Quad and imagine that they could feel the heave of the spinning world, while they watched Capella scale the dome of sky. And once, when he had come to the master's room a little early on the night of the section meeting, Mr Heal cleared his throat and, taking Edwin by the ear, began to read from an olive-green book that he held in his hand. He read atrociously. 'How do you like this?' he said. 'H'm?' He said 'H'm' with a little snarl in it.

'The Dog Star and Aldebaran, pointing to the restless Pleiades, were half up the southern sky, and between them hung Orion, which gorgeous constellation never burnt more vividly than now, as it swung itself forth above the rim of the landscape; Castor and Pollux with their quiet shine were almost on the meridian: the barren and gloomy square of Pegasus was creeping round to the North-West; far away through the plantation Vega sparkled like a lamp suspended amid the leafless trees, and Cassiopeia's chair stood daintily poised in the uppermost boughs.'

Edwin thought it was 'fine.'

'Better than the *Story of the Heavens*?' asked Mr Heal. 'Come, come, Ingleby . . . surely not?'

'Rather, sir,' said Edwin.

Mr Heal shut the book. 'The barren and gloomy square of Pegasus,' he murmured to himself. And all the rest of that evening Edwin found himself remembering the phrase. The bareness and the gloom of Pegasus had never struck him before; and now, at a sudden suggestion, the whole atmosphere of the sky had changed;

the vague heavens became habitable to his fancy; new and immense territory opened before him. . . .

He told Widdup what he remembered of the passage that Heal had read.

'Poor old Tommy,' said Widdup compassionately. 'It isn't an exact square at all. It's an irregular quadrilateral, and I don't see anything gloomy about it. Stars aren't gloomy anyway. Look how they sparkle. Look at Vega.'

Above the gable of the swimming bath that wonderful star throbbed white.

II

In the Lent term they both had measles and woke with swollen eyes to find each other side by side. In the same ward at the Sanatorium was Layton's successor, Payne, a thawed, thin, almost unfamiliar Payne; and while they swam upon the first buoyant spirits of convalescence, the sheer hulk of Griffin was hove in, in the snivelling misery of the early stages. Edwin thought that Griffin had never looked so beastly, and rejoiced in the pig's humiliation; but when, at last, Griffin recovered he found his ancient victim a handy plaything, and for want of anything better to do attempted to seduce Widdup from Edwin's friendship. Edwin never quite forgave Widdup his defection; and when they were all better and back in school again he found that he still had to avoid Griffin on whom the habit of persecution had been regrafted. It seemed such a pity . . . he thought he had outgrown all that sort of thing.

And now he hated Griffin for a new reason. While

they were together in the Sanatorium, after the departure of Payne, Griffin had spoken boastfully of his relations with one of the 'Skivvies' whose morning task was the making of beds in D dormitory. It appeared that Griffin had met her first by accident, and later by appointment, and he himself described her as 'very hot pastry.' He was familiar with certain shops in the neighbourhood of Shaftesbury Avenue, which made persuasion easy. To Edwin, whose life at home had kept him in ignorance of all that a boy of fifteen ought to know, everything sounded horrible, and he said so. He remembered the look of the girl quite well: rather anæmic with black hair and a pretty oval face. Griffin and Widdup howled over his innocence, and began to instruct him in the 'origins of life.' All these things came as a great shock to Edwin. He felt a passionate conviction that the other two were fooling him. Unfortunately his father had never employed a coachman.

'I don't believe a bit of it,' he said with tears in his eyes.

'You silly kid,' said Widdup. 'Everybody knows it's true.'

'I don't believe my father would do a thing like that,' cried Edwin.

It seemed suddenly as if the world had become a gross and horrible planet. The fetters of earth were galling his limbs. He felt a sudden immense yearning for the coolness and cleanliness of stellar space. If only he could pass the rest of his life in the great square of Pegasus! . . . And he was consoled by the assurance that in heaven, at any rate, there was no marrying or giving in marriage. . . .

III

Next term, to his great joy, he was moved up into the Upper Fourth, and had for his form-master the gentle Mr Leeming, a fat and cheerful cleric with clean-shaven cheeks that shone like those of a trumpet-blowing cherub. He was very short-sighted, rather lazy, and intensely grateful for the least spark of intelligence to be found in his class. Edwin soon attracted him by his history and essays. His mother had fulfilled her promise of reading *The Fortunes of Nigel* aloud in the holidays, and, as luck would have it again, the Upper Fourth were supposed to be concentrating on the early Stuarts. To the bulk of the form the period was a vast and almost empty chamber like the big school-room, inhabitated by one or two stiff figures, devitalised by dates—a very dreary place. But to Edwin it was crowded with the swaggerers of Alsatia, the bravoes of White-hall, with prentices, and penniless Scotchmen, and all the rest of Scott's gallant company.

'Have any of you read *Nigel*?' Mr Leeming asked the class.

'I have, sir,' said Edwin shyly.

'I have already gathered so, Ingleby. Has anybody else read it?'

Silence. 'I think I shall ask the head master to set it to the Middle School as a holiday task,' said Mr Leeming.

Thus narrowly did Edwin escape the disaster of having Scott spoiled for him.

Mr Leeming was the master in charge of the library, and Edwin began to spend the long winter lock-ups in this room. Most of the boys who

frequented it came there for the bound volumes of the *Illustrated London News*, with their pictures of the Franco-Prussian War, Irish evictions, the launching of the *Great Eastern*, and mild excitements of that kind. Edwin found himself drawn early to the bookcase that held the poets. To his great joy he discovered that the key of his playbox fitted the case; and so he would sometimes sneak into the room at odd moments in the day and carry away with him certain slim green volumes from the top shelf. These were Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, together with their Complete Works. He had been attracted to them in the first place by the memory of a polished urn, about as graceful in contour as a carpenter's baluster, that stood in a neglected corner of the parish church at home. This urn was encircled by a scroll which bore these directions :—

'O smite thy breast and drop a tear—
For know thy Shenstone's dust lies here.'

A palpable falsehood; for Edwin had already discovered the tomb of the elegist in another part of the churchyard, elbowed almost into the path by that of a Victorian ironmonger.

But it was something to have been born in the same parish as a poet; and Edwin, at an age when everything is a matter of taking sides, ranged himself boldly with Shenstone and pitted his judgment against that of Johnson, who rather sniffed at the poet's unreality, and quoted Gray's letters in his despite. The crook and the pipe and the kid were to Edwin very real things, as one supposes they were almost real to the age of the pastoral ballad; and the atmosphere was

the more vital to him because he dimly remembered the sight of the poet's lawns frosted on misty mornings of winter, the sighing of the Leasowes beeches, and the damp drippings of the winter woods. Thus he absorbed not only Shenstone but Shenstone's contemporaries: men like Dyer and Lyttleton and Akenside, and since he had no other standard than that of Johnson he classed them by the same lights as their contemporaries. Brooding among Augustan poetasters in the library Mr Leeming found him.

'Poetry, Ingleby?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Let me see? Prior? Ah, that was a little age, Ingleby! The Augustans were not great men, and some of them were very coarse, too. Have you read the *Idylls of the King*?'

Mr Leeming introduced Ingleby to the great Victorian, for he himself was an ardent believer in all the Galahad nonsense, and was astonished at Ingleby's ignorance of the school in which those cherubic cheeks had expanded. He was very fond of talking about purity and conceived it his duty to keep his class spotless. In the Lent Term, when the form were working through the catechism, his glosses were most apparent. The explanation of some passages troubled him. '*From fornication* . . that's a bad thing,' he would mutter.

And once having put Edwin in the way of perfection he was not going to look back. A week or two later he asked him how he was getting on with Tennyson. 'Who is your favourite character in the *Idylls*?' he asked.

Edwin glowed. 'Oh, sir, Launcelot—or Bors.'

'But what about Sir Percivale? "Sir Percivale

whom Arthur and his knighthood called ' The Pure,'" he quoted in the Oxford variety of Cockney.

'I don't know, sir,' stammered Edwin. 'They seem somehow made differently from me.'

'Arthur,' said Mr Leeming impressively, 'has a great and wonderful prototype whom we should all try to imitate no matter how distantly.'

Edwin, who had read the dedication, wondered why Mr Leeming lowered his voice like that in speaking of the Prince Consort.

In some ways he was grateful to Mr Leeming for superintending his literary diet, but he soon detected a sameness in the fare. One day he had got hold of a big Maroon edition of George Gordon, Lord Byron, with romantic engravings of the Newstead ruins and the poet's own handsome head, and Mr Leeming had swooped down on him, faintly flushed. 'Lord Byron,' he had said, 'was not a good man. Have you read *Hiawatha*?' And he reached down Longfellow . . . Longfellow in green boards decorated with a geometrical design in gold, and irritating to the touch.

At last Edwin was almost driven from the library by Mr Leeming's attentions. He never read Byron because the books were too big to be sneaked out of the room beneath a buttoned coat; but he did read, without distinction, nearly every volume of poetry that he could smuggle out in this way. He read these books in second 'prep' when Layton was poring over Plato at his high desk, when Widdup was working out the cricket averages of the second eleven, and Griffin was looking for spicy bits in the Bible. And as second prep was generally a period of great sleepiness—since the boys had risen so early,

and by that time of evening the air of the house classroom had been breathed and rebreathed so many times as to be almost narcotic, the poetry that he read became interwoven with the strands of his dreams. Dreamy and exalted, poppy-drenched, all poetry seemed at this time; and it was to intensify this feeling of sensuous languor that he so often chose the poems of Keats.

In an introduction to the volume he had discovered that Keats had been an apothecary, and this filled him with a strange glow; for since the unforgettable incident of the toothbrush he had been (against his will) diffident about his father. He determined never again to be ashamed of the shop. When he read of 'rich lucent syrops tinct with cinnamon,' he remembered a great cut-glass bottle of some cough linctus that glowed like a ruby in the shop window when the gas was lit at night. In other ways he tapped a good deal of the romance of his father's calling. He remembered a drawer labelled 'Dragon's blood' . . . the very next best thing to a dragon's teeth with their steely harvest. He recalled a whole pomander-full of provocative scents; he shuddered at the remembered names of poisons, and other names that suggested alchemy. He almost wanted to tell Mr Leeming when next they spoke together, of his father's trade, but he wasn't quite sure if Mr Leeming approved of Keats. It was not likely that he would see very much more of this master, for he was high up in his form and certain to get a move into the Lower Fifth at the end of the term. In some ways he was not sorry; for the signs of Mr Leeming's affection, the warm encircling arm, the pervading scent of honeydew, and the naïve glances of those watery eyes were

embarrassing. Before they parted Mr Leeming showed his intentions more clearly.

'Would you like to learn Hebrew, Ingleby?' he said.

Edwin would have liked to learn Hebrew—but not out of school hours. He hesitated.

'I thought you might some day wish to take Holy Orders, and I should be glad to teach you.'

'I will ask my father, sir,' said Edwin modestly.

That was one of the penalties of having interesting eyes.

CHAPTER III

THE GREEN TREES . . .

I

THE holidays that followed this term were the most marvellous. From first to last they were bathed in the atmosphere of mellow gold that makes beautiful some evenings of spring, all tender and bird-haunted; and his mother, too, was more wonderful than she had ever been before. On the very first evening when she had come upstairs to tuck him in and to kiss him good-night, she sat on the bedstead leaning over him with both her arms round his neck and whispering secrets to him. Very extraordinary they were; and as she told him, her lips were soft on his cheek. She said that only a month before she had expected to have a baby sister for him—she had always longed so much to have a baby girl—and before the first jealousy that had flamed up into his mind had died away, she told him how the baby had been born dead, and how terribly she had felt the disappointment. He wondered, in the dark, if she were crying.

'But now that I've got my other baby again,' she said, 'I am going to forget all about it. We'll be ever so happy by ourselves, Eddy, won't we? In the evenings when father is down at business we will read together. This time we'll take turns reading, for you're growing such a big boy. And we'll go wonderful walks, only not very far, because Dr Moorhouse says I'm not strong enough yet.

I want you to tell me everything—everything you do and think about at school, because you're all I've got now. And you're part of me, Eddie, really.' At this she clutched him passionately.

For a moment Edwin was nearly crying, and then, suddenly, he saw another side to it: her expressed feelings were somehow foreign to him and made him ashamed, as did Mr Leeming's watery eyes when he talked about Arthur's prototype. In the face of this eager emotion he felt himself unresponsive and a little consciously superior and male. He didn't want to feel superior to his mother—but there it was! Even at breakfast next morning he was shy, and it surprised him when he saw her clear gray-green eyes wholly free from any answering shame. So unconscious was she of his scrutiny that he went on looking at her—really looked at her for the first time in his life. And looking, he began to differentiate this new being, so fragile and eager and girlish, from the old traditional mother whom he had loved and accepted as unquestionably as the miles of blue sky above him. He discovered that she was a woman, remembered Griffin, and blushed.

'What a colour you've got, boy,' said his father.

And it struck him also that she was smaller than she used to be.

'Isn't mother rather thin?' he asked his father.

Mr Ingleby smiled, and in his grave, shy way put out his hand to touch hers as it lay on the table.

'You silly boy,' said his mother.

But her denials did not satisfy him. He knew, for certain, that she was different from the mother whom he had known. He noticed, too, that she was not allowed to eat the same food as the rest

of them. Sometimes she would forget their rules and taste things that were forbidden, and then his father would gravely reprove her. Instead of bread she was ordered to eat a sort of biscuit which Edwin's curiosity made him anxious to taste. He was disappointed; for they had no taste at all. 'What are they made of?' he asked; and they told him 'Gluten. . . That's the sticky part of wheat without starch.'

And yet, in spite of her illness, they had never been happier together. The new intimacy, that had begun with her painful confidences of the first evening, continued. In particular she told him of the difficulties which she was having with his Aunt Laura, her sister, who had lately married a small manufacturer and come to live near Halesby. The story was an old one and rather unhappy. It began years and years ago in the days of his mother's childhood, days that she remembered so unhappily that she never really wanted to recall them. He had never before known anything about his mother's childhood. He had just taken her for granted in her present surroundings. Now, in the long firelight evenings, she told him how her forefathers and his had once been great people, living in a stone border castle high above the Monmouth marches, and how, with the lapse of time and the decay of the bloody age in which their violence had prospered, the family had fallen from its estate and lost its lands; how the tower of the castle had been broken and under its shadow a farmhouse had arisen in which they had lived and scraped what income they could make from a little valley-land and many acres of mountain pasture. Now there were none of them left there; but still, where the

tracks grew stony and the orchards began to thin away, the walls of the house crumbled patiently under the shadow of overhanging mountain-ridges. 'Your grandfather was the last of them, Eddie,' she said. 'He was a farmer.' And for a moment consciousness of Griffin and his social prejudices invaded the picture. She told him of spring days, when the clouds would come sweeping out of England on the back of the east wind and be hurried like the frothy comb of a wave against the mountains, and how they would then break asunder on the darens and fall back in a drenching mist over the lonely house by Felindre, and for days the farm would be islanded in fog. But on the summit above them, the sheep were grazing in the sunlight and the buzzards hunting, and in the misty lowlands beneath lay orchards full of faint-scented apple blossom. 'We were not the only decayed family there,' she said. 'There were others, and greater—such as the Grosmonts of Trecastel. But old Mr Grosmont had two sons, and father only had three daughters. I was a sort of ugly duckling, Eddie; they never really liked me. And I was never happy there.'

'I think I must be like you, darling,' said Edwin. 'I had a rotten time at St Luke's at first. Even now I don't quite seem to be . . . I don't know . . . ordinary.'

She smiled and kissed him.

'My father was a dear,' she said, 'but mother really hated me. Your aunt Carrie was much cleverer and better-looking than me, and so they always made a fuss of her and left me to myself. She had all the advantages. You see, I suppose they thought she was worth it. She was a

beautiful, selfish creature, with the most lovely hair.'

'I'm sure it wasn't lovelier than yours, darling,' said Edwin.

'Then she went and threw herself away, as mother called it, on a man she met at a hunt ball in Hereford. And she died, poor thing, with her first baby. It was an awful blow to mother. It made her more horrid to me than ever. I suppose she found me such a poor substitute. If it had been me it wouldn't have mattered. I went to keep house for your great-uncle in North Bromwich; and there I met your father. I have never been really happy. You see, nobody had ever taken any notice of me—before that. Then mother began to put all the hopes that had been disappointed in Carrie on Aunt Laura. Nothing was too good for her. They spoiled her, and spoiled her. It was worse when father died and mother was left to do what she liked with the money. And when your Aunt Laura came here and met Mr Fellows and married him, your grandmother blamed me. I couldn't help it . . . and in any case Mr Fellows is an awfully nice, quiet man. I did all I could for her, too, getting her house ready and that sort of thing, and now she's so dreadfully difficult. I suppose she's really annoyed to think that she hasn't done better for herself with all her advantages of education, and just lets it off on me. It's dreadfully awkward, Eddie. I think she's even jealous that their house isn't as big as ours. I simply daren't tell your father the sort of things she's said. If he knew one of them he'd never forgive her. He's like that about anything that affects me.'

'I should be, too,' said Edwin.

'Would you?' she smiled.

'Yes. . . . You've made me hate Aunt Laura already.'

'You mustn't feel like that, Eddie. She's young, and she's been spoilt. It isn't all her fault, probably.'

'If it were any one but you I wouldn't mind. But you're so wonderful.' He loved to look into her eyes when she loved him.

II

After this they had wonderful times together. In the mornings Edwin would indulge his glorious idleness among the books of the dining-room shelves, and after middle-day dinner, when his father had gone back to the shop, he would set out with his mother up the lane under the tall elms and through the sloping field that led to the mill pond. They did not walk very far because she must not be over-tired; but the field was so crowded with wonders that they were tempted further. Cowslips steeped the meadows in their vinous perfume; and between the saplings of the hazel copse they saw the sheeted hyacinths gleaming like pools that mirror the sky in open places. Beyond the land of meadows and copses they came to a belt of the old forest, through which they could see up a broad green lane to the very shoulders of the hills : Pen Beacon heaving its fleece of black firs, and the domed head of Uffdown.

His mother would sigh a little when she saw the hills. In weather that threatened rain from the west they would seem so near, with their

contour hard against the watery sky and the cloud shadows all prussian blue.

'Oh, I should love to be there, Edwin,' she would say.

'Can't we walk there some day, dearest?'

'It's such a terrible drag up. We should both be dreadfully tired.'

'Oh, I wish we could, mother; I do wish we could.'

The day of their last walk together, when they came to the end of the green lane and were sitting on the gate, she jumped down on the far side and set off walking up the track.

'Come along, Eddie,' she said, 'I'm going up to Uffdown.'

'Oh, mother,' he cried. 'Isn't it too far. I should like to carry you!'

And half-doubting, but fearfully eager for adventure, they set off together. As they climbed upward it seemed that the air grew sweeter every moment, and when they had left the wood behind them they came out on to a stony lane with a surface of grit veined by the tracks of storm-water, and on either side banks of tufted grass along which gorse was swaying in the breeze. And here the clouds seemed to be racing close above their heads, all dazzling white, and the blue in which they moved was deep and limpid. Mrs Ingleby's gray-green eyes were full of laughter and her face flushed with the climb.

'Oh, mother,' Edwin panted, 'what an awful lick you go! Hadn't we better sit down a bit?'

'And catch cold! You careless boy. We'll get to the top soon now.'

'But you mustn't tire yourself.'

She laughed at him.

'Oh, this air is wonderful,' she said. 'Just as if it had come straight out of the blue, all washed and clean.'

On the top of Uffdown where the cloak of pine droops to a hollow between the two peaks, they sat on a dry, yielding hedge-side, where the grass was thick as the fleece of a mountain sheep, and four lovely counties dreamed below them.

'Eddie,' she asked, half joking, 'where does the west wind come from?'

Edwin was willing to instruct.

'Oh, I don't know, dearest—from Wales and the sea, I suppose.'

'Put your head close to mine and I'll show you. . . . Those hills that look like mountains cut out of blue cardboard are the Malverns, and far, ever so far beyond them—yes, just to the left you see a level ridge that drops suddenly in the west. You don't know what that is, Eddie, do you?'

'No—I don't like to look at single things. I like to feel it's all—what d'you call it?—all dreamy underneath one.'

'But you must look at that. It's the mountain, Eddie, close to where I was born.'

'Felindre?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'But I never knew that you could see it from here. You never told me.'

'You know why. I told you that I was never happy there. And now, you see, since the old people died and the land was sold, it really has nothing to do with us.'

'Still, it's rather wonderful to be looking into —into another country. It *is* Wales, isn't it?'

'Yes—part of it's in Wales. Felindre is in England.'

Edwin pondered for a moment.

'I'm rather glad I'm not half-Welsh, anyway,' he said. 'But I wish I'd been there.'

'Do you?' she answered dreamily. 'Yes—I wish we had been there together. It was a different sort of life. I thought—I just thought I should like to see it again.'

He was a little alarmed at the wistfulness in her voice.

'Mother—what do you mean?' he cried.

'Nothing, Eddie, nothing. It was another life.'

She put her arms round his neck and pulled him gently to her. He was content to lie there, with his head on her breast, while she talked in a low voice of that distant place and of her own childhood. He listened in a dream and did not speak at all until she began to tell him a long story which the Felindre shepherd, Morgan, had told her when she was a child. Then Edwin opened his eyes and stopped her.

'Dearest, I know that story,' he said. 'Oh, go on, it's wonderful. . . .'

'Perhaps I've told it you before: perhaps I told you when you were a baby—I used to talk to you a great deal in your cradle. Perhaps . . . I was rather lonely when you came, Eddie.'

'Oh, no, I'm sure you haven't. . . .'

'Look, the cloud is blotting out my mountain now,' she said. 'It is time we were going.' The counties were asleep already.

Over the brow of the hill they stepped into a different world, for where the smoke of the black country had blotted the fading skyline a hundred pit fires were beginning to blink out, and nearer still a pillar of flame shot up into the sky.

'Oh, look, mother,' Edwin cried.

'They're puddling the iron at the great Mawne

furnaces. Stand still a moment, we might almost hear their roar.'

But no sound came to them but the clear tinkle of a stream plunging into its mossy cup, and this seemed to bring them back into touch with the lands that they had left. They hurried down through the dark woodland paths, and when they reached the little town lights had bloomed in all the ugly cottage windows, and the streets seemed deserted, for the children were indoors.

III

She told him that she was rather tired, and would like to lie down and rest for a little time before supper; and with the glow of the hill air still on his cheeks and his limbs full of a delicious lassitude he strolled down the lane and into the ill-lighted street of the town. He passed through the little passage at the side of the shop and through the dark bottle-room where he had to pick his way among drug hampers and empty acid-carboys. Through the upper part of the glass door he could see his father sitting on a high stool at the desk, his spectacles half-way down his nose, dreaming among the bad debts in his ledger. Edwin stood there for several minutes, for the picture fascinated him.

Mr Ingleby had now reached the indeterminate period of middle age: his hair was gray, rather thin about the crown, and wanted cutting. In the shop he always wore a black alpaca jacket, and this, by reason of its thinness, made his chest look mean and skimpy. In this state of comparative repose he was not impressive. From time to time he raised his hand to scratch his shoulder. A customer came in to buy a cake of

soap and Mr Ingleby climbed down from his stool to attend to her. He opened a glass case, and, groping for this particular soap, upset at least half a dozen others. Edwin noticed his hands, which were clumsy and heavily veined on the back, and felt sorry for him when he stooped to pick up the cakes of soap that he had upset. It all seemed so inelastic, so different from the eager youth of his mother. Examining his father from a physical standpoint he recalled the day on which Widdup had begun his sexual education and had laughed at his innocent ideals. Now Edwin laughed at himself; and the laugh made Mr Ingleby look up as if a flying beetle had banged against his ear.

'Hallo, boy,' he said. 'You were late for tea, you two!'

'Oh, we had a lovely walk—right on to Uffdown.'

'I hope you didn't tire your mother. You must be careful, Eddie. Do you want me to give you something to do? You shall weigh these powders then: Phenacetin, five grains in each. Only try to be quiet; I have to get on with these Lady-day bills.'

Mr Ingleby yawned and Edwin started to weigh powders.

'Father, what is Dragon's Blood?'

'It isn't the blood of dragons, Edwin. . . .' Mr Ingleby smiled under his glasses.

'Oh, father, don't rot.'

'Dragon's Blood is a resin. It's prepared from *Dracæna Draco*, and it's used for mahogany varnishes.'

'O-oh.'

'I'm sorry to disappoint you, Edwin.'

Silence for five minutes.

'Father . . . Keats was a chemist.'

'Keats?' Mr Ingleby pronounced the word in the same tone as he would have used if he had been saying 'Keatings, madam?'

'The poet.'

'Oh—Keats. Yes, of course he was. He was consumptive, too. Died in Italy.'

'Yes, father.' Edwin was thankful to leave it at that; thankful that his father knew just so much, even if he didn't know any more. It would be terrible to know more than your father, to feel that he was a sort of intellectual inferior to you—a boy of fifteen. He would not talk of these things any more.

They walked home in silence. It seemed as if Mr Ingleby were still worrying about his wife's tiredness, for when she tried to joke with him at the supper table he was moody and restrained.

'I'm not really a bit overdone,' she protested, kissing his forehead.

'You're like a pair of children, the two of you,' he said, and indeed his gray seriousness seemed to isolate him from all the joy of youth that was in them.

That night Edwin's mother sat for a long time on the bed talking to him in a low voice. She would not tell him any more about the mountain farmstead that had once been a castle, even when he begged her to do so. She wanted to talk, she said, about all that he was to do during the term, to make wonderful plans for the holidays, when the days would be longer and they would be able to sit out under the limes on the lawn in the twilight.

'I am going to plant evening stock,' she said, 'all along the lawn border in between the irises. Besides, I shall be stronger then and we will often take our tea with us to Uffdown.' And at last she said, 'Eddie, you bad boy, you must really go to sleep now, darling. You've got such a big journey before you to-morrow, and you're sure

to get a headache if you don't have a good night's sleep.' She kissed him many times.

IV

And when she had passed downstairs to the dining-room where her husband sat before the fire in a plush arm-chair, lightly dozing, she kissed him, too. She was feeling queerly flushed and emotional, and somehow the atmosphere of that little room felt stuffy to her after the air of the open spaces.

'I'm restless to-night, dear,' she said. 'I hate Eddie going back to school. It's dreadful to be parted from your baby just when he's beginning to be more and more part of you.'

'Come close to me, by the fire, child,' he said.

'No . . . I want some music, I think.'

She went into the drawing-room and lit the candles on the piano. Sitting there, in the pale light, with a shawl thrown over her muslin tea-gown, she looked very frail and pathetic, against the piano's ebony. She played the *Sonata Appassionata* of Beethoven, and the rather tawdry little knick-knacks on the piano danced as if they were made uncomfortable by the rugged passion. The whole room seemed a little bit artificial and threadbare, ministering to her discontent. When the *Sonata* was finished she still sat at the piano, conscious of her own reflection in its polished panels, and wanting to cry. She could not bear the taunting of that image, and so she snuffed the candles and sat in the dark.

Edwin tossing on the verge of sleep was conscious of the music ceasing, and, in the silence that followed, the cool cries of the owls.

CHAPTER IV

MIDSUMMER

I

EDWIN had expected that the wrench of going back to school after these holidays would be unbearable: but when he returned to St Luke's next day he was almost astonished at his own acceptance of the change. It was evening when he arrived, and boys who had come from a greater distance than he were already unpacking their play-boxes in the long box-room. Edwin sniffed the smell which he had once found so alien —that mingled odour of cricket flannels, biscuits, bat-oil, and faint mustiness, with relish. He passed through the swing-doorway into the library, dark and echoing and groped his way towards the poetry bookshelves. He ran his fingers over the brass netting that protected their case, he even tried his play-box key to see if it had lost its cunning. The lock opened easily, and he felt for the backs of the big maroon volumes of Byron with their shiny title-plates. He thought of Mr Leeming and of Sir Percivale. A foolish phrase, one of a kind that he had often lately found running through his brain—rhythmical groups of words that meant nothing in particular—formed itself in his mind and stuck there. '*The white lie of a blameless life.*' He laughed at himself. These words that came from nowhere were the strangest things. He heard the echo of his own laugh in the dark and empty room. The white lie of a

blameless life. . . . It pleased him to think that he had done with Mr Leeming as a form-master, even though the question of Hebrew and Holy Orders remained unanswered.

Stepping out of the library he was hailed by Widdup; a plumper, sunbrowned Widdup fresh from three weeks with a doctor uncle in Devonshire. There had been long drives through the lanes at the back of Start Bay where the primroses (so Widdup assured him) were as big as door-handles; there had actually been sea-bathing in April, and the joy of watching huge liners, homeward bound from India, making the Start. 'And hills . . .' said Widdup, 'you never saw such hills. Talk about these downs. . . .'

'It's awfully hilly country at home,' said Edwin.

They were walking side by side and up and down the quadrangle, from the gym to the swimming bath, and dozens of couples were crossing and recrossing in the same track. From time to time they would catch a few words of conversation, eager and excited, as they passed. Above them stretched a deep sky powdered with dust of gold.

'What did you say?' said Widdup. 'I'm awfully sorry, old chap. I didn't catch it. Douglas shouted to me. . . .'

'I don't know . . .' said Edwin. 'Oh, yes . . . hills. I said there are some ripping hills at home. One called Uffdown.'

'But these hills in Devonshire . . . you've got to get out of the trap for nearly every one. I used to drive my uncle. It was awful sport. You'd think I was rotting, but it's true.'

The chapel bell started tolling in short jerks. The couples began to drift towards the northern end of the Quad, where the gates were being

unbolted. For five minutes exactly the gravel of the wide path sloping to the chapel gave out a grating sound beneath the pressure of many hundred feet. The last stragglers hurried in. The master on duty entered the porch. All the life of that dark mass of buildings spread upon the bare edge of the downs became concentrated within the walls of the chapel. Its stained glass windows glowed as with some spiritual radiance. Inside they began to sing the hymn which is used at the beginning of the term :—

'Rank by rank again we stand
From the four winds gathered hither,
Loud the hallowed walls demand
Whence we come and how and whither . . .'

and from the open doors there issued a faintly musty smell, as though indeed the dead air of the holiday-time were dispossessed and young life had again invaded its ancient haunt.

II

It seemed to Edwin from the first as though the concentrated delights of this summer term were surely enough to efface every memory of discomfort and suffering that had clouded his early days at St Luke's. He was exceptionally happy in his new form. The form-master, whose name was Cleaver, was an idle man with a young wife and a small income of his own, circumstances that combined to make him contented with the conditions of servitude at St Luke's which weighed so heavily on the disappointed and underpaid

Selby. He was also a fine cricketer, accepting the worship which was the prerogative of an old 'blue,' and convinced in his own mind—if ever that kingdom were possessed by anything so positive as a conviction—that the main business of the summer term was cricket. The atmosphere of the cricket-field, with its alternations of strenuousness and summery lassitude, pervaded his classroom, and the traditions of that aristocratic game, in which nobody could conceivably behave in a violent or unsportsmanlike manner, regulated his attitude towards the work of his form.

Edwin found it fairly easy to keep his average going at the departments of the game in which Mr Cleaver was concerned: Latin and Greek and English. If, as occasionally happened, he made a century, Cleaver was ready to congratulate him as a sportsman and a brother. To be beaten by some yorker of Tacitus was no crime if he had played with a straight bat and didn't slog. Even a fool who could keep his end up had Mr Cleaver's sympathy.

It was not only in the spiritual atmosphere of the Lower Fifth that Edwin found content. The classroom which the form inhabited was the most pleasant in the whole school, placed high with a bow-window overlooking a pleasant lawn that a poplar overshadowed. Beyond the lawn lay a belt of dense thickets full of singing birds, on the edge of which laburnum and lilac were now in flower: so that when Edwin's innings was over, or Mr Cleaver was gently tossing up classical lobs to the weaker members of the form, he could let his eyes wander over the warm air of the lawn to plumes of purple lilac waving in the summer breeze, or the tops of the avenue of lime-trees

leading to the chapel spire. Even in the heat of the day the Lower Fifth classroom was cool and airy, visited only by wandering bees and scents of lime and lilac beckoning towards a golden afternoon.

The term was full of lovely animal delights; the luxury of flannels and soft felt hats; the warmth of a caressing sun; the contrast of cool drinks and water-ices; the languors of muscular fatigue; the reviving ecstasy of a plunge into the green depths of the swimming bath; the joy of extended twilights, and, in the thin air of evening, a multitude of sounds, soothing because they were so familiar as to be no more disturbing to consciousness than silence: boys' voices calling in the fields, the clear click of bat and ball, the stinging echoes of the fives-court. Great days . . . great days . . .

Edwin found himself becoming keen on cricket —not indeed from any ambitions towards excellence, though the mere fact of sitting at Mr Cleaver's feet was an inspiration, but for the sheer joy of tiring himself at the nets and the peculiar charm of the game's setting of sunburn and white flannels and green fields. Cricket was a part of this divine summer, and therefore to be worshipped. Little by little as he practised he found he was beginning to improve, and before the middle of the term he was developing into a fair bowler of medium pace and had taken his own place in the house second eleven. It did him good in other ways; for in this capacity he found that he was at length accepted naturally and without any exceptional effort on his part. So, miraculously, he seemed to have arrived at a degree of normality. This, in itself, was a triumph.

Spending long afternoons with his team in the

lower fields, he found that he could feel really at home with other 'men.' He discovered qualities in them that he had never guessed before. In the cricket field even Douglas became tolerable; no longer a terrible and baleful influence with scowling brows under a mop of black hair, but just a jolly good wicket-keeper. Edwin began to be feverishly interested in the fortunes of the second eleven: kept their averages, produced an elaborate table of league results, conceived a secondary but violent interest in the progress of his own County, Worcestershire, in those days, thanks to the brilliancy of the Foster brothers—slowly rising to fame. Sometimes while he lay on the grass, watching his own side bat, he would see the figure of old, fat Leeming ambling along the path. He would shrink into the concealment of his uniform flannel, being afraid that his patron would speak to him and isolate him from his pleasant company. Leeming was not fond of cricket and his shadow would mar this particular joy. Only when he had passed relief would come. Great days . . . great days.

III

In the pursuit of these joys it is not to be supposed that Ingleby forsook his friends the poets. In the flush of early June, before the crowding of midsummer's high pomps, there came to him many moments of ecstasy. In the spinney at the back of the head master's house there was a nightingale to which his evening dreams were dedicated. All the twilights were full of delicious scents and sounds. Of all other times he remembered

most clearly certain evenings when he would walk all alone up the long slope of the gravel-path from the chapel, hearing the whizzing wings of the cockchafers that made their home in the shrubs on either side. Sunday evenings . . . Sundays were the most wonderful days of all; not, indeed, because the chapel services made any religious appeal to him—the advances of Mr Leeming had scotched that long ago—but because of the peculiar atmosphere of freedom which the long day possessed and which, somehow, even the Head's sermons failed to mar. He hated the Head's sermons; he hated, in particular, the sight of Griffin, who was a useful member of the choir, singing, like any golden-headed cherub, a solo in the anthem. But he loved the music, and particularly the psalms, with which the daily matins and evensong made him so familiar that he couldn't help knowing many of them by heart.

The chants to which the psalms were sung at St Luke's had been specially composed for the school chapel by Dr Downton, the organist, who had fitted them with modulations that were, at the least, surprising to ears which could not be happy or feel secure far from the present help of tonic and dominant. Most of the congregation at St Luke's considered that Sammy's tunes were rotten. At first they were inflicted upon the choir in manuscript; but in Edwin's second summer they appeared collected in a slim gray volume, and Heal, who acted as choirmaster, explained that they were the result of the most careful study of the Hebrew text, of night-long ecstasies, and the deep brooding of Dr Downton's mind. It gave Edwin a picture of Sammy, with his gray, impassive face, weaving his tunes out of the silence

of the night by candlelight in the high turret-room which that solitary master inhabited, and for this alone he began to love the St Luke's Psalter. It is certain, at any rate, that his early acquaintance with strange harmonic ideas made a great deal of the most modern music easy to him in after years. Later, in North Bromwich, when he became immersed in the flood of Wagner, he often wondered whether Sammy in his lonely tower, had known these wonders, and cherished them up there all by himself. He certainly couldn't associate that sort of music with the naïvetés of Mr Heal's flute. And yet, you never can tell. . . . Mr Heal knew his Hardy. . . .

Then there were Sunday walks with Widdup over the downs under a grilling sun, and through the woods of York Park, where Griffin and Douglas, poaching, had encountered keepers; but the glare and dryness of a chalk country in summer does not invite exercise, and the most precious hours of all were spent on the sloping banks between the Grand Entrance and the chapel. Here, early on a Sunday morning, Edwin and Widdup would carry out an armful of rugs and cushions: and there all day they would lie in the shade of the limes, reading, writing letters (Ingleby always had a letter from his mother to answer on Sundays), watching the restless flight of little copper butterflies, seeing the hot sky deepen to an almost southern blue behind the pointed gables of the school. Against such skies the red brick of St Luke's became amazingly beautiful. It seemed to Edwin that in his home, on the edge of the black country, the sky was never so clear and deep. Lying there he would read the books that he had smuggled out of the library . . . poetry

. . . a great deal of it. Novels . . . he read, and he always remembered reading. Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*: 'The Murder in the Rue Morgue,' 'The Pit and the Pendulum,' 'The Masque of the Red Death.' Such titles! There seemed to be no end to the leisure of those days.

With the middle of the term came the Race Meeting on the Downs. During the whole of Race Week the college bounds were tightened, so that no boy dared show his face outside the iron gates. Within the short memory of the school, a prefect—no less!—had been expelled, confronting his own house-master on the edge of Tattersall's ring.

On Wednesday of the week the race for the Six Thousand Guineas, the greatest of the classics, was to be run, St Luke's within its closed gates buzzed like a hive. In every house and every form there were sweepstakes. Griffin made a book; boasted in Hall that he meant to see the 'Guineas' run or die. Ingleby very nearly admired him for his courage. The great day came. All morning from the open windows of the Lower Fifth class room he could hear the rumble of loaded brakes climbing the Downs road. In those days there were no motors, but white dust, up-churned by many hundreds of wheels, filled the air and drifted in clouds into the college quad. From a high wall at the back of the swimming-bath they could see the road itself and the unceasing, hot procession moving upwards; brakes full of men who carried beer-bottles; bookies in white top-hats; costers with buttons as big as half-crowns driving carts drawn by little donkeys whose thick coats were matted with sweat; gipsies out to prey upon the rest of mankind; smart gentlemen

in dog-skin gloves driving tandem; regimental drags. All the road was full of dust and torn paper and the odour of beer and sweat, and every member of the crowd looked anxiously forward, as though he feared he would be too late for the 'Guineas,' toward the summit of the Downs where the grand stand, like a magnificent paper-rack, stood up white against the sky. Down in the playing-fields that afternoon nobody thought much of cricket. For all the locked iron gates, the eager consciousness of the crowd on the Downs had invaded St Luke's. Ingleby was scoring for his own side's innings. Douglas, who was sitting astride of a bat, kept his eyes fixed on the airy summit of the grand stand, now fringed with the black bodies of a thousand spectators. He pulled out his watch.

'They're off!' he said. 'My God, don't I envy old Griff!'

Ingleby forgot his scoring. He, too, was wondering what had happened. He could imagine it easily, for several times on the Downs he had crossed the tan gallops on which, it was said, horses from the royal racing stables were trained, and seen incredibly slender creatures, lithe as greyhounds, thundering, neck and neck, over the sprinkled bark. He could think of nothing swifter or more exciting on earth. The game stopped. All the players were looking at the grand stand, as though their eyes could tell them which horse had won. Two minutes. Three. From the top of the Downs a great roar came down to them. Some monstrous beast, no congregation of men, was roaring there. The black fringe on the grand stand became animated by waving arms and hats and sticks. A cloud of tinier specks detached themselves. These

were the carrier pigeons; and in a very little time they were flying high above the playing-fields, seeing, no doubt, the black mass of London outstretched so many miles away.

'God . . . I wish I could shoot one,' said Douglas. 'I never heard such a row as they made up there. Ingleby, I'll lay you two to one the Prince's horse has won.'

That evening witnessed the canonisation of Griffin. Veritably he had seen the Guineas. A crowd of admirers listened to his story between preps in the house classroom. His manner was indolent and boastful. This was to be no more than the first of many exploits. On Friday—Ladies' Day—the race for the Birches would be run. He had put the money he had won over the Guineas on a horse called Airs and Graces, and was going to see her bring his money home.

Ingleby had never heard the name of this horse before, but when the house sweepstakes for the Birches was drawn he found that Airs and Graces had fallen to him. Griffin, who evidently considered that this animal's destinies were in his keeping, offered him a pound for his ticket. Ingleby wasn't having any. Douglas, called in to give an opinion on the damnableness of that skunk Ingleby's sticking to a sweepstake ticket for which he had been given a fair offer, agreed it was a bloody shame that a man like that should have drawn anything but a blank. What did he know about racing? Racing was a pastime of gentlemen in which he couldn't obviously have any interest. Did Ingleby understand that Griffin was going to see the race itself, a thing that he would never have the guts to do in all his life?

A couple of years before Ingleby would not

have known how to meet the coalition; it is possible, even, that he would have given up his ticket, and improbable that he would have received the pound that Griffin offered. By this time he had learnt that no answer at all was better than the softest; that when Griffin and Douglas started that sort of game the best thing was to keep his temper and clear out as quickly as possible. On this occasion the chapel bell saved him. All through the service that evening he was pondering on Griffin's words, trying, rather obstinately, to convince himself that they weren't true; that he wasn't the skunk they had agreed to call him; that he was sufficiently gentle in birth to have an interest in what the newspapers called 'the sport of kings,' that, at a pinch, he might summon up sufficient 'guts' to emulate the boldness of such a daring customer as Griffin. Perhaps it was all too horribly true. . . .

He couldn't accept it. It was inconceivable that all the attributes of knightly courage should be vested in people like Griffin; and yet he couldn't be certain that he wasn't deceiving himself. It was so easy to imagine oneself brave . . . the easiest thing in the world. 'That's the worst of me,' he said to himself, 'I can imagine anything. I could imagine myself hiring a coach and wearing a white top-hat and asking old fat Leeming to come to the Birches with me on Friday. I'm all imagination and silly rot of that kind; but when it comes to the point I'm no damned good at all.'

It wasn't the first time that he had realised defects of this kind. Term after term he had been reproaching himself for the lack of moral or physical courage.

There was only one way out of it: to prove

that he was capable of the things which he feared by doing them. In this way he had driven himself to batter his hands to pulp by playing fives without gloves; for this he had taken a dive into the deep end of the swimming-bath for the sole reason that he found it impossible to float in the shallow water and had determined to swim; for this he had forced himself to spend long hours, or to waste long hours, over Geometry, the subject that he hated most. Now, in the same way, and wholly for his own satisfaction, he determined to go to the Birches.

That night, walking up and down the Quad, he opened the subject to Widdup. He said,—

'Do you know I drew Airs and Graces in the house sweep? Griffin offered me a quid for the ticket.'

'I should jolly well let him have it,' said Widdup, explaining the mathematical side of the question. 'You see, you've won a twenty to one chance already. The chances against the horse winning are . . . well you can work it out easily. I'll do it for you in second prep. Besides, old Griff has a lot of money on the horse and he's going to see the race run.'

'Well, so am I,' said Ingleby. Widdup laughed, and that annoyed him.

'What do you think of it?'

'I think you're a damned fool,' said Widdup.

Ingleby left it at that. Perhaps Widdup was right. But why in the world should the same thing count for heroism in the case of Griffin and folly in his own? He distrusted the mathematical Widdup's sense of proportion. In any case he had to go through with it. If he didn't, no subsequent heroism could ever persuade him that he

wasn't a coward and worthy of every epithet with which Griffin had loaded him. It was in the same spirit, he imagined, that knights in the ages of chivalry had set themselves to perform extravagant tasks, that saints had undergone monstrous privations; just to convince themselves that they weren't as deficient in 'guts' as they feared.

The business came more easily than he had expected when first he tied himself to his resolve. Friday at St Luke's was a 'fag-day.' On Friday afternoon, that is to say, there were no organised games. The afternoon prep started at half-past three, and afternoon school at four-fifteen. The great race, he learned, was to be run at three o'clock; and this would give him time to miss the hour of prep which was not supervised and to be ready for an innings of Greek with Cleaver. An easy game, Greek. . . . For once in a way he was prepared to slog like blazes.

Up to the last moment Widdup refused to think that he would go through with it. He didn't believe, indeed, until he saw Edwin climb on to the top of the wooden fence in the nightingale's spinney at the back of the Head's house and drop over into the road.

'Now, I should think you've had enough of it,' said Widdup. 'If the old man came along and saw you there, you'd be bunked to-morrow. Come along. . . .'

'I'll be back just after three,' said Edwin. 'You'll be here to give me a hand over?'

'All right,' said Widdup. 'You *are* a bloody fool, you know.'

CHAPTER V

AIRS AND GRACES

He didn't need telling that. With every step the conviction was borne in on him, and when he came to the end of the wooden palings that marked the school boundary he was very near to giving up his enterprise. He could easily, so easily, slip over the hedge on the opposite side of the road and wait there until the race was over and the bookies' messenger-boys came racing down the hill on their bicycles, bells tingling all the way; and then he could meet Widdup at the appointed place and say that he had seen the race. By that time rumour would have told him the winner's name. But that wouldn't do. Not that he cared twopence-halfpenny whether he told the truth or a lie to Widdup, but because he would feel such a wretched coward in his own mind. He had got to prove to himself that he possessed the moral courage which he doubted. It was only the existence of the very real danger—and he envisaged not only his own expulsion, but harrowing scenes of remorse and distress at home—that made the thing a fair test. He had to go through with it.

Beyond the line of fencing, even standing in mid-stream of that determined crowd, he felt himself curiously unprotected. He did a curious thing. He turned his college cap, with its circular stripes of green, inside out, presenting to the world a dirty brown lining. This wasn't enough for him: he also turned up the collar of his Eton

coat. But the crowd was thinking of one thing only and none seemed to notice him. They noticed nothing. Even the sellers of the race cards and the tawny gipsies who cried for a piece of silver to cross their palms, and promised good luck, were unheeded. Edwin concealed himself, or imagined some measure of concealment, in an eddy of dust between a heavy wagonette, crammed with men who looked like licensed victuallers, and a coster's donkey cart. He found that by holding on to the step of the wagonette he felt safer. It was reassuring to hold something. What a rotten coward he was!

At last one of the men in the last seat of the wagonette who had been rolling about with his eyes closed, opened them and looked at Edwin. They were curiously watery eyes, and his mouth was all over the shop. When he had dreamily considered the phenomenon of Edwin for a little while he addressed him,—

'You look 'ot, young man.'

It *was* hot, Edwin panted.

'Bloody 'ot,' said the man in the wagonette. As an afterthought he took a bottle of beer, about a quarter full, from his pocket. The cork came out with a pop. 'Gas,' said the fat man, and chuckled. 'Gas . . . eh?' He took a swig, and, with the froth fringing his moustache, offered the bottle to Edwin. Edwin shook his head.

'You *won't?*' said the fat man. 'You're workin' 'arder than I am. Oh, well, if 'e won't,' he continued dreamily, and finished the bottle. Then he pitched it over the hedge.

The dust was terrible. On either side of the track the hedges and banks were as white as the road. The horses pulled well, and even hanging

on to the step Edwin found it difficult to keep up with them. At the crest of the hill the driver whipped them into a trot. Edwin let go the step and was cursed fluently by the coster for standing in the way of his donkey-cart. His friend waved him good-bye. He found himself caught up in a stream of other walkers, hurrying in a bee-line for the grand stand, now distantly visible with the royal standard drooping above it. Behind him and in front the black snake of that procession stretched, sliding, literally, over the shiny convolutions of the Down that the feet of the foremost had polished, and moving in a sort of vapour of its own, compact of beer and strong tobacco and intolerable human odours. From the crown of the Downs Edwin looked back at the playing-fields, the tiny white figures at the nets and in the fives-court that sometimes stopped in their play to watch the black serpent in whose belly he now moved. They seemed very near—far too near to be comfortable; and even though he knew that nobody down there could possibly see him, he felt happier when a billow of the Down hid the plain from sight.

It was only when he reached the grand stand, losing himself in the thick of the crowd that clustered about it, that he began to feel safe. He looked at his watch and found that he had a quarter of an hour to spare. A little old man in seedy black clothes grabbed his elbow fiercely. 'Young sir, young sir,' he said, 'take my advice . . . gratis; free; for nothing.' He laughed, and Edwin saw gray bristles stretched on his underlip. 'Take my advice. Never expose your watch at a race-meeting. Myself . . . I've learnt it from long experience, my own and my friends'. . . . Never

even take a watch when I go racing. No, I leave it at home. A beautiful half-hunter by Benson of Ludgate Hill, with enamelled face. Yes. . . . You take my advice. A thing to always remember. Yes. . . .'

Edwin seriously thanked him. A roar went up from the crowd. 'The Prince. The Prince has entered the Royal Box,' said the old man. 'God bless him.' He raised a dusty top-hat. An extraordinary gesture for this wrinkled, gnomish creature. 'Yes,' he mumbled; 'a handsome time-piece. . . . Benson of Ludgate Hill. A very prominent firm. We shall see nothing here. You follow me.'

Edwin followed. More beer, more tobacco, more of the curious composite smell, more positively vegetable than human, that he had begun to associate with trampled pieces of paper, probably the debris of bags that had once held fruit of some kind. The little man pushed his way deftly through the crowd. He was so small and inoffensive that nobody seemed to notice him; and indeed the leading characteristics of this crowd's vast consciousness seemed to be good humour. The bookies in their white hats, the many-buttoned costers, the sweating men in black coats, the very waiters in the refreshment tents, staggering under leaning towers of beef-plates, seemed determined to enjoy themselves in spite of the heat and the smell of their neighbours under the white-hot sky.

Edwin, too, forgot his anxieties. The vastness of the crowd subtly shielded him. He felt newly secure, and his spirit was caught up into its excitement and good humour. He even turned down his collar. And all the time his

mind exulted in a queer sense of clarity, an intoxication due, perhaps, to his successful daring. In this state he found all his surroundings vivid and amusing; all colours and sounds came to him with a heightened brilliancy. He smiled, and suddenly found that a young gipsy woman with her head in a bright handkerchief was smiling back at him. He thought it was jolly that people should smile like that. He thought what jolly good luck it was meeting his guide, the shiny shoulders of whose frock coat he saw in front of him. His quick mind had placed the little man already: a solicitor's clerk in some ancient worm-eaten Inn of Court, a relic of the dark, lamp-litten London of Dickens: a city of yellow fog and cobbled pavements shining in the rain: of dusty, cobwebbed law-stationers' windows and cosy parlours behind them where kettles were singing on the hob of a toasting fire, and punch was mixed at night.

It seemed to him that he could have met no more suitable person than his friend; for really all this racing crowd were making a sort of Cockney holiday of the kind that the greatest Victorian loved most dearly. He began to find words for it all. He *must* find words for it, for it would be such fun writing to his mother about it. If he dared. . . . It would be time enough to write a letter about it when the business was finished without disaster. There was always the possibility that he would be found out and expelled. Even if that should happen, he thought, he would like to tell his mother. . . .

Together they passed the level of the grand stand. This huge erection of white-painted wood provided the only constant landmark, for Edwin

was not tall enough to see above the shoulders of the adult crowd in which he was moving. Now they had left the grand stand behind it seemed that they must surely be crossing the course. And then a bell clanged and the crowd parted like a great wave of the Red Sea in pictures of the Exodus. Edwin found himself clinging to the coat-tails of his friend, and the little man, in turn hanging on, as if for his life, to a whitewashed post from which the next wave would have sucked him back. The crowd swayed gently, settling down and leaving them stranded upon the very edge of the course. 'That's a trick worth knowing,' said Edwin's friend.

Opposite them the stands, well known to him on Sunday walks as a vast skeletal erection, stood clothed in flesh and blood : tier upon tier of human faces packed one above the other looked down on him. Edwin had never before realised how pale the faces of men and women were. From the midst of them there rose a ceaseless murmur of human speech, shrilling occasionally like the voices of starlings when they whirl above an autumn reed bed, and then, as suddenly, still. For one extraordinary moment they were nearly silent. 'They're off!' said the little man. . . .

Again the murmur of the stands arose. A bookie just behind them was doing his best to get in a last few bets, entreating, proclaiming passionately the virtues of 'the old firm.' His red face lifted above the crowd, and while he shouted saliva dribbled from his mouth. A curious roaring sound came from the other side of the horse-shoe course a mile or more away. He stopped with his mouth open in the middle of a

sentence. Something had happened over there. Everybody, even those who couldn't see anything, turned in the direction from which the sound came. Edwin turned with them. He couldn't imagine why. And when he turned his eyes gazed straight into those of Miss Denning, the matron of the College Sanatorium, marvellously dressed for the occasion and leaning upon the innocent arm of Mr Heal. Thank God, Mr Heal was short-sighted! Edwin felt himself blushing. He knew for certain that she had seen and recognised him; for his sick headaches had often taken him to the Sanatorium and he had always been rather a favourite of hers. She stared straight at him and her eyes never wavered. Obviously the game was up. He fancied that her lips smiled faintly. Never was a smile more sinister.

Edwin had an impulse to bolt . . . simply to turn tail and run at his hardest straight back to the college. He couldn't do that. Between him and escape, an impassable river, lay the parabola of yellow grass over which the Birches was even now being run. Feeling almost physically sick, he slipped round to the other side of his companion. He wished that gnomish creature had been bigger. 'They're at the corner . . . if you lean out you can see . . . look, they're coming into the straight . . . Airs and Graces leading. Down they come. The finest sight in the civilised world.'

Edwin didn't see them. He saw nothing but the phantom of Miss Denning's eyes, her faint and curiously sinister smile. He wished to goodness the race were over. Now everybody was shouting. The stands rose with a growl like great beasts heaving in the air. Something incredibly swift and strepitant passed him in a whirl of wind

and dust. The crowd about him and the heaving stands broke into an inhuman roar. The little old man beside him was jumping up and down, throwing his top-hat into the air and catching it again. The whole world had gone shouting and laughing mad. Edwin heard on a hundred lips the name of Airs and Graces. It meant nothing to him. Now he could only think of escape; and as the crowd bulged and burst once more over the course he made a dash for the other side.

Mounted police were pressing back the tide; but Edwin was small, and quick enough to get over. He pushed and wriggled his way through masses to which there seemed to be no end. Only in the rear of the stands the density of the crowd thinned. Then he broke into a run and though he was soaked with sweat and his head was aching fiercely, he did not stop running until a billow of the Down had hidden the stands from sight.

In a little hollow littered with tins and other debris, and choked with nettles and some other hot-smelling herb, he lay, recovering his breath, and, for the first time, thinking, beside a diminished dewpond of dirty water. He was miserable. Fate now brooded over him as heavily as the white-hot sky, and he couldn't, for the life of him, imagine why. It was ridiculous, in any case, that the mere sight of a woman's eyes should have worked so extraordinary a miracle. Yet this was no less than the truth. Suddenly, without a shadow of warning, all the happiness and light and colour had gone out of his adventure. That which had been, at the least, magnificent, had now become childish or nearly silly. Reflecting, he couldn't be satisfied that anything was changed. Nothing had really changed except himself; and he didn't

want to admit that he had changed either. No, he hadn't changed. Only his mind was just like the dew pond at his feet in which the burning sky was mirrored. Some days it would be blue and white and others black with thunder. But the pool would be just the same. 'I oughtn't to be more miserable now than I was when I came up here; and then, apart from being a bit funky, I felt ripping.' None of these sober reflections relieved him. All the rest of the way back he felt hunted and miserable, and something very near to panic seized him at the point when he reached the college palings.

At the corner, looking horribly scared, Widdup was waiting.

'Thank goodness you've come,' he said. Then he suddenly went white.

'What's the matter?' cried Edwin.

'Oh, Lord, it's the Head.'

The voice of the head-master came next,—

'Hallo, what are you doing here? Let me see —Widdup, isn't it?'

'Yes, sir.'

A mortar-board topped the palings.

'Ingleby—What's this? what's this? What are you doing there?'

A moment of brilliant inspiration.

'Widdup and I were fooling, sir, and he chucked my cap over the fence. May I get it, sir?'

'Serious—very serious,' muttered the Head. 'The letter of the law. Race-week. You're out of bounds, you know—technically out of bounds. Boys have been expelled for less. Yes, expelled. Ruin your whole career.'

Edwin saw that he was in a good humour; saw, in the same flash, the too-literal Widdup, white with fear.

'I'm sorry, sir,' he said . . . 'awfully sorry.'

'Mph. . . . What were you two doing here?'

'I wanted to get some poplar leaves for my puss-moth caterpillars.' Silence—then, rather lamely,—

'They're in the fourth stage, sir.'

'Are they?' The Head smiled, possibly because he approved of this fervent manifestation of what the headmasters' conference called 'nature study,' possibly at Edwin's sudden revelation of schoolboy psychology. Decidedly he approved of the puss-moths. He had been reading Fabre aloud to his wife. Fabre, too, was a schoolmaster, poor devil! He did not speak his thoughts: schoolmasters never can. He said,—

'Let me see, Ingleby, you're in the Lower Fifth?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I must speak to Mr Cleaver. . . .' He didn't say what he must speak about. 'All right—get along with you.' He left them, walking away with his hands joined behind his back supporting an immense flounce of black silk gown. Edwin scrambled over the fence; his hands, as they clutched the top of it, were trembling violently.

'Well, you are a prize liar,' said Widdup, 'and the old man believed every word of it.'

'I know,' said Edwin. 'That's the rotten part of it. . . .'

'What on earth do you mean?'

'Oh, I don't know. . . .' He knew perfectly well what he meant.

'Who won?'

'Airs and Graces.'

'Then you've won the sweep.'

'Yes.'

Ten minutes later he was back in Mr Cleaver's

class-room trying to make himself so inconspicuous that he wouldn't be called upon to make an exhibition of himself, and, as luck would have it, nothing of any difficulty came his way to drag him from his comfortable obscurity. Even though the intense excitement of his adventure had now faded, the atmosphere of that high room had changed. He felt that he didn't somehow belong to it; or, rather, that he had left something behind. All through that drowsy hour some part of him was still being hurried over the hot downs, swept along in the sweating crowds of the racecourse, and this circumstance made his present life strangely unreal, as though he were a changeling with whom it had nothing in common. Gradually, very gradually, the old conditions reasserted themselves, but it was not until the insistent discipline of the evening service in chapel had dragged him back into normality that his adventure and the influence of the strange people with whom he had rubbed shoulders began to fade. Widdup, with his unblushing admiration, helped. There was no shutting him up.

'Well, you have a nerve,' he said. 'I wonder what you'll do next. . . .'

'Oh, stow it,' said Edwin. 'I've finished with that sort of thing. I'm not cut out for a blood.'

'I can't think how you did it.'

'Neither can I. It was damned silly of me. I just wanted to satisfy myself that . . . that I had some guts, you know. I didn't really care what you chaps thought about it. It was sort of private. . . .'

CHAPTER VI

THUNDER WEATHER

I

THAT night a thrilled but incredulous dormitory discussed the exploit of Ingleby. Without pretending to have approached the dizzy achievements of Griffin, Edwin perceived that in addition to reassuring himself he had managed to atone for a little of his former reputation. He found himself treated with something that was almost respect, partly for the daring of the whole expedition, but even more for the crowning achievement of his inspired lie.

'I wish you hadn't told them that,' he said to Widdup.

'Why not?' said Widdup. 'That was the best part of it.'

'I don't think so. I don't mind telling a lie, but it's rotten if the chap you tell it to believes you.'

'Get out,' said Widdup. 'If you want to know the truth it's only another example of your rotten cockiness.'

Why? Why? Why? . . . He couldn't understand it. It seemed to him that the most natural decent things in the world were all labelled as abnormalities. Even if he had proved to his own satisfaction that he possessed the usual amount of 'guts,' it seemed that he was a kind of freak. There was no getting to the bottom of the mystery. Yet, when he came to consider himself, he was

certain that his attitude was infinitely humble. Perhaps that was the trouble. Other chaps didn't think about themselves. Edwin envied them unfeignedly. He felt that he was condemned to travel a sort of vicious circle. Thus, if he were honest to himself he was bound to fail in the ordinary normal standard and to be considered, if not a prig, an oddity. If, by enormous efforts, he were to compel himself into the trodden ways of thought and conduct, he couldn't be honest—and in the process of regaining his honesty he found himself fighting his way back to the original misfortune. There was no way out of it. Isolated he must be. He determined, above all things, that even if he were not ashamed of his isolation, he wouldn't be proud of it. It wasn't easy.

The whole incident of the Birches—which, after all, he had meant for a sort of private trial—was becoming a nuisance. He almost welcomed the attitude of Griffin, who scoffed at the whole business and refused to believe he had been there. Griffin, his own reputation for valour and cunning being in question, determined to prove that Edwin had not been near the race. In the dormitory that night the coalition set themselves to this business, beginning with an examination at the hands of Griffin himself.

'Widdup says you went to see the Birches run.'

'Does he?' said Edwin.

'Now, none of your fooling, Ingleby. You're a damned little liar. You never put your nose near the races.'

'Well, it doesn't matter to you anyway.'

'Doesn't it? You'll soon know that it does. We're not going to have any liars in this house. You'd better tell the truth at once.'

'All right, then. I did go to the races.'

'The swine! . . . Get a towel, Duggie.'

'Well . . . you asked me. . . .'

'Now, I'm going to prove that you're a liar. Of course you know that already. But you ought to be shown up for your own good. Then you'll get a tight six. What were Airs and Graces' colours?'

'I don't know what his colours were.'

Griffin howled. 'HIS . . . listen to the swine. He doesn't know a horse from a mare, Duggie. Ingleby, how do you tell a horse from a mare?' Edwin blushing, was overwhelmed with laughter. By this time the towel was ready, wet, and twisted into a cable. 'I'll teach you the colours of Airs and Graces,' said Griffin. 'We've had quite enough of your airs and graces here. Next time you'll find it pays to tell the truth in this dormitory.'

Edwin got his six, having been bent double over the end of his own bed by the other seekers after truth. It was worth it. When the lights were out and he was comfortably settled in bed he decided that that sort of thing oughtn't to make any difference. 'My mind to me a kingdom is,' he said to himself; and in his mind the great guts question had been settled for ever. As for the lamming. . . . Well, it might have been a gym shoe. . . . While he lay thinking of these things he was surprised to hear the voice of Widdup, who slept next to him, speaking in a whisper. 'I say,' he said, 'did you really go to the Birches, or were you pulling my leg?'

'Of course I did,' he replied. It gave him a little shock to find that so slight a thing as a display of physical violence had shaken Widdup's faith.

I'm glad of that,' came Widdup's apologetic whisper. A long silence. 'You've won the sweep, anyway,' said Widdup. 'Thirty-eight and sixpence.' Edwin grunted.

'If you reckon that you'll be here four more years, taking into account the number of men—average, you know—who go in for the house sweep every year, you could calculate the exact chances against your ever

He was asleep.

II

And while he slept after that day of unusual excitement and fierce colour, he had a curious dream. In the beginning it reflected a little of the anxieties of the afternoon, for he found himself hurrying in the middle of a huge and sweaty crowd which made no way for him. He did not know why he was running so violently; but of one thing he was certain, and this was that he was going to be late. At first he had in front of him the little man in the rusty coat who had been his companion on the Downs: the same queer creature now endowed with an aspect even more grotesque and an agility more elfish, so that Edwin knew from the first that this time he was sure to lose him and never to catch him up again. All the masses of people through whom he pressed were moving even faster than himself and in the same direction, so that it seemed as if he could never gain ground at all, but must go on running for ever with no sight of his goal, nor any hope of getting nearer to it. At last his breath gave out, and he stopped. It wasn't a bit of good; for the moving crowd wouldn't stop with him, and he was pushed forward

by this multitude of tall people, knowing that if he faltered for a moment or fell (as in the end he must), he would certainly be trampled to death by the feet of those who followed.

At last the little man outstripped him altogether, and feeling that he had lost all hope, Edwin gave a cry. When he cried out the whole hurrying crowd melted away, the noise of their padding footsteps left a clear patch of silence (it was like that) and a puff of cool, thin air blew suddenly right into his nostrils. He thought, 'I'm not going to be late after all. . . . Why didn't they tell me that I was going to Uffdown?' There was no air like that in the world. He drank it down in gulps as a horse drinks water. 'Eddie, you'll choke yourself,' his mother said. . . . 'The light won't last much longer.' 'But why should it last, darling?' he replied. 'You've got to look over there,' she said, 'in the west. You see that level ridge dropping suddenly? Well, it's the third farm from the end. Do you see?'

'Yes, darling, I can see it quite clearly. . . .' And he did see it. A long building of bluish stone with small windows set flush in the walls and no dripstones save one above the oak doorway. Not a soul to be seen. It looked as if the place had been deserted by living creatures for many years. 'I can see it,' he said, 'but I don't think anybody lives there.'

'But you can see it?' she asked him eagerly. 'Can you see the little bedroom window on the left—the third from the end—quite a little window?'

It was difficult to see, for, after all, it was more than a hundred miles away, and all the time that he was looking, the streamers of cloud kept rolling down from the darens on the mountain and

drenching the whole scene in mist. 'Eddie . . . there's not much time,' she pleaded. 'Do tell me.'

'Yes,' he said. 'I can see the window you mean.'

She sighed. 'I'm so glad, Eddie. I did want to show it you.'

'But why were you in such a hurry?'

'It was my last chance of showing it to you.'

'Whatever do you mean, darling?'

She turned her face away. Now it was quite dark. 'I'm really dreaming,' he thought, 'and this is a sort of stage on which they can do lightning tricks like that.' But there was no doubt about it being Uffdown. All round the sky the pit-fires of the black-country were flickering out. And though he couldn't see her face, he could feel her soft hand in his. 'At any rate, I've written . . .' she said at last.

That was the sentence which he carried in his mind when he awoke. A letter. But she didn't usually write to him before Sunday, and it was now only Saturday. Yet, when he came into Hall for breakfast a letter was lying on his plate. There was something so strange about the whole business that he was almost afraid to open it. He had a sudden, awful intuition that she was dead. Ridiculous, of course, for dead people didn't write letters. Smiling at himself, yet scarcely reassured, he opened the letter and read it.

'*My Darling Boy* (she wrote),—*Did you really make fifteen? You must be getting on. Aunt Laura has just been in to tea, and we talked such a lot that I have only just time to write this before father goes down to business and can post it. I have some very interesting news for you. The other afternoon Mrs Willis of Mawne came in to see me. She*

and Lilian are going to Switzerland for a month this summer, and now she suggests that I should join them there. It won't be just yet, and I think —no, I'm sure—that I should be back again before your holidays. Father wants me to go. I haven't been very well, and the doctor says he's sure it would do me good. All my life I've wanted to see Switzerland. I'm most awfully excited about it, Eddie, and father says he can spare me. Won't it be wonderful? They are going about the end of June. I won't forget that postal order, but I'm rather poor myself just at present. Eddie, do you keep my letters? I think I should like you to. The double stocks which father planted in the long bed are just coming out.

'Good-bye, my darling,

'Your loving

'Mother.'

Of course nothing, in spite of the news of the Swiss excursion, could be more ordinary That would be wonderful for her . . . of course it would. And yet, in spite of all these reasonable convictions he couldn't get that dream out of his head. Something, he felt sure, was going wrong.

He tried to analyse the source of his disquietude. 'Perhaps I'm jealous,' he thought. He was most awfully jealous of anything that other people had to do with his mother, and, anyway, he didn't know these Willis people very well. They were new friends of hers: a family of wealthy iron-masters whose works had suddenly risen in the year of the Franco-Prussian war, and were now slowly but gigantically expanding. They lived at Mawne Hall, a sad but pretentious mansion of the departed Pomfrets, of which Edwin knew only the wrought-iron gates at the bottom of a

steep drive. They had a son, Edward, of very much the same age as himself, but the Willises had no great educational ambitions (that was where Edwin's mother came in), and had sent him to the ancient but decaying Grammar School of Halesby, an impossible concern in the eyes of any public-schoolboy. The Willises had pots of money. Here again Edwin suspected them. It rather looked as if they had 'taken up' his mother; and nobody on earth had the right to do that. He hated the Willises (and particularly Edward) in advance. He always hated people he hadn't met when he heard too much about them. He thought that the new intimacy probably had something to do with his Aunt Laura, who was diffuse and fussy and ornate, and not a patch on his mother. Nobody was a patch on his mother . . .

He couldn't get rid of his anxiety, and so, in the heat of the moment, before morning school, he answered her letter. 'Oh, darling, don't go to Switzerland with a lot of strangers. If you do go, I feel that I shall never see you again,' he wrote. He knew it wouldn't be any good. She couldn't reasonably do anything but smile at his fancies. But he couldn't help it. He even took the trouble to post the letter in the box at the Grand Entrance, so as to make certain that he couldn't change his mind.

On the way into the classroom he met Griffin, who pushed a packet into his hand. 'Here you are,' he said. 'Take it.' It was thirty-eight shillings in silver, the first prize in the house sweep on the Birches. He wished he had remembered about it. He would have told his mother in the letter not to bother about the postal order. It was an awful thing to think of her being hard-up

and himself rolling in this prodigious and ill-gotten fortune.

The morning class was listless, for the weather remained at a great pitch of heat, and the only thing that any one thought of was the fixture with the M.C.C. which would begin at noon. Cleaver always assisted as umpire at this match, and so the deserted Lower Fifth occupied a corner of the Big Schoolroom by themselves. In this great chamber—it was said that the roof-span was as wide as any in England—Edwin dreamed away the morning, reading, sometimes, the gilt lettering on the boards on which the names of scholars were recorded: giants who had passed before him along the same corridors, and whose names were only memorable as those of heroes in a mythology, or more ponderably evident in reports of parliamentary debates and the scores of county cricket teams.

Opposite him hung the board devoted to the winners of entrance scholarships. His own name was there. Edwin Ingleby . . . 1895. He remembered the day when it had almost embarrassed him with its fresh gold lettering. Now the leaf had toned down, and the name had sunk into obscurity beneath a dozen others. So the passage of fleet time was measured on these tables. In a few more years nobody who didn't take the trouble would read his name. Even those of the batch before him were half-buried in obscurity. One other name arrested him: G. H. Giles. He knew nothing of Giles except that this brilliant beginning had been followed by disaster. The name of Giles appeared on no other board; for the term before Edwin came to St Luke's Giles had been expelled from the school. Edwin didn't

know what he had been expelled for; but the circumstance, remembered, afflicted him with a kind of awe. 'It might happen so easily,' he thought. Why, if he hadn't lied to the Head the day before he might have been expelled himself, and years afterwards some one sitting in his place would stare at the name of Ingleby with the self-same awe. The voice of Mr Leeming, stuck fast where Edwin had left him a year before, in the Stuart period, recalled him. 'We will pass over the unpleasant . . . most unpleasant side of Charles the Second's reign. Unfortunately, he was a thoroughly bad man, and his court . . .'

Edwin heard no more, but he heard another sound peculiar to the Big Schoolroom on Saturday mornings: the measured steps of the school sergeant plodding down the long stone corridor which led to the folding doors. On Saturday morning the form-masters presented their weekly reports to the Head, and boys whose names came badly out of the ordeal were summoned to the office to be lectured, to be put on the sort of probation known as 'Satisfecit,' or even to be caned.

The Lower Fifth knew none of these terrors. Cleaver was far too easy-going to take his weekly report seriously; but the lower ranks of Mr Leeming's form trembled. You could never be sure of old Leeming. The folding doors opened. Mr Leeming stopped speaking, and the sergeant walked up to his desk and stood waiting at attention while Leeming read his list. He looked over his glasses. 'Let me see . . . Sherard . . .' he said. 'Sherard, the head-master wishes to see you at twelve-thirty.' His voice was so gently sympathetic that nobody could possibly imagine that he had had anything to do with this calamity. 'Then . . . the Lower

Fifth . . .' he fumbled with the paper. 'Ingleby. The head-master will see you at the same time.' He looked over at Edwin with the most pained surprise. 'Very good, sergeant,' he said.

Edwin felt himself going white. Yes, that was it. That was the explanation of his feeling of unrest. He was going to share the fate of the traditional Giles. Good Lord . . . think of it! Miss Denning had done this. And yet he could hardly believe it—she had always been far too nice for that. Now his face was burning. It struck him that it wasn't a bit of good worrying. If it weren't . . . if it weren't for his mother it really wouldn't be so bad. He couldn't bear to think of her disappointment in his disgrace. She thought so much of him. It wouldn't be quite so bad if she were not ill. It might kill her. Good God! . . . that would be awful! Suppose, after all (it was no good supposing), that the Head wanted to see him about something else. . . . There wasn't anything else. Unless . . . unless it were something to do with his mother. Unless she were seriously ill . . . even something worse. But he had her letter. It couldn't be that. Yesterday she was well enough to write to him. No . . . the story was out, and he was going to be expelled. In three quarters of an hour he would know the worst. He wished that the time would pass more quickly. Time had never been so slow in passing. The clock in the tower chimed the quarter. From where he sat he could see the tower through the upper lights of the long window. He could see the minute-hand give a little lurch and move infinitesimally forward. He remembered Widdup telling him exactly how many times it moved to the minute. Was it twice . . . or three

times? He had forgotten. There must be something wrong with the clock to-day. In the middle of this purgatory one half-humorous fancy came to him: 'At any rate old Griff will know that I did go to the races now.'

III

They waited, ten or twelve of them, in the twilight of the passage outside the Head's study. The atmosphere of this place resembled that of a crypt, or more properly—since the keynote of the St Luke's architecture was baronial rather than monastic—a dungeon. The only light that came to them entered by way of certain dusty windows of lancet shape on either side of the gothic porch. Beneath these windows languished a pale array of botanical specimens rotting in their test tubes and bearing witness to the week-old zeal of the Head's particular section of the Natural History Society.

They waited, a miserable company of all shapes and sizes: some, who knew the worst, with a rather exaggerated jauntiness, determined to make the best of it: others, such as Edwin, being in doubt of their fate and burdened with a spiritual apprehension far worse than any physical penalty which might overtake them.

The sergeant opened the door. 'Sherard W.,' he said. Sherard W. crammed a sweaty cap into his pocket and started forward, eager to get it over. The aperture which admitted him showed no more than the end of a table crammed with books, a number of highly-varnished shelves, a polished floor covered with Turkey carpet, and

a blaze of mocking sunshine. The nails in the heels of Sherard W.'s boots rang on the stone flags. When he reached the Turkey carpet his steps became silent. The door closed. The rest of them strained to listen. They heard little: nothing but the quiet rumour of the head-master's voice, and little patches of silence in which the replies of Sherard W. were not heard at all. A moment later he emerged. A number of whispered questions assailed him, but Sherard W. didn't feel like answering questions. He brushed by the rest of them as quickly as he could go, with his school-cap pressed to his eyes. Another patch of sunlight was revealed. 'Frazer . . .' called the sergeant. And Frazer, a tall lout of a boy with sallow face came forward and was swallowed up in the same way as Sherard W. A minute later the sound of dull blows was heard.

'Frazer's got it,' said somebody. 'One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six . . . Poor old Frazer!'

'Six from the Head isn't equal to three from Cleaver. You should see Cleaver's biceps in the gym.'

One by one the members of the crowd entered and returned. It seemed to Edwin that his turn would never come. All the time that he waited his imagination (accursed gift!) was playing with the hidden scene within: the long table, that he had seen only once before, and, at the head of it, the lean, bearded figure in the silk gown wielding an absolute power of life and death like God in the Old Testament. Yes, it was just like that. He remembered a minatory text that hung cob-webbed in one of the attics at home: PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD. It was not pleasant to hear

these muffled sounds of chastisement, but what was a flogging (the Head's favourite word) compared with the more devastating fate that awaited him? 'That's why he's keeping me till last,' he thought.

'Ingleby . . .' said the sergeant. Edwin had time to fancy that his tone implied a more awful enormity than he had put into any other name. He entered, and stood waiting in the sunlight. It was rather less frightening than he had imagined, this long room, relatively luxurious, and the pale man at the head of the table with his lined, black-bearded face, and the peculiar twitching of his left arm which had always added to the sinister side of his equipment. For a moment he took no notice of Edwin. Then he looked up and smiled. Would the storm never break?

'Ah . . . Ingleby.'

'Yes, sir.'

'I hope your entomological zeal isn't going to take you up to the racecourse, Ingleby. How are the puss-caterpillars getting on?

He smiled again, and showed his teeth beneath his shaggy moustache. Edwin was seized with a sudden terror. The worst had happened, and now the Head was playing with him. He could say nothing.

'Eh? . . . What's the matter with you? You aren't faint, are you? You'd better sit down.'

Edwin trembled into a chair.

'Now, are you all right?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I sent for you, Ingleby, because I have been having a talk with Mr Leeming.'

What in the world had old fat Leeming to do with it? Edwin wished he would get it over.

'Mr Leeming has always given me good reports of you. . . I don't know if you deserve them . . . and last night I saw Mr Cleaver, who . . . um . . . um . . . tells me that you are one of . . . No, I'll leave that part out . . . that you've got plenty of brains when you choose to use them, but that you are somewhat lacking in application. H'm?'

'Yes, sir.'

Why wouldn't he get to the point?

'He says, Ingleby, that you're a dreamer. Well, you know, there's no use for dreamers in this world. They're not wanted. Even dreamers with the blessing of good brains. H'm?'

'Yes, sir.'

'But Mr Leeming is satisfied, and so am I, that if you chose to make an effort, and take a . . . a healthy interest in things, we might do some good with you. You might win scholarships, and be a credit to the school. That's what we want. That's what your parents sent you here for. Now . . . now Mr Leeming tells me that you aspire to becoming a priest of the church. . . .'

'No, sir.'

'No. . . .? But Mr Leeming told me he had talked the matter over with you?'

'He mentioned it, sir . . . but I didn't say anything. I . . . don't think I do want to, sir.'

The Head frowned. 'You mean that you don't feel worthy of so great a vocation? Well, you're young. You're a promising boy. I want to do what is best for you . . . and the school. At the end of this term you are likely to get a move, and after a certain time I don't think, from the scholarship point of view, you can begin to specialise too early. You have shown a certain . . . aptitude

for English. You might read History. You might stick to Classics. What do you think about it?'

'I should like to read History, sir.'

'Very well, I'll write to your father about it. We won't say anything more about the Church for the present. That will come later. I expect Mr Leeming will talk it over with you. You may go now.'

CHAPTER VII

IMPURITY

I

THE 'little chat'—as Mr Leeming would certainly have called it—did not take place for a long time, for the reverend gentleman's mind had become exercised with a problem of greater importance than the devotion of Edwin. It wasn't exactly his fault. Mr Leeming was a bachelor. He was now in his forty-third year. Naturally endowed with an intense shyness of disposition which the forced publicity of his two professions, in the pulpit and the classroom, had overlaid with a veneer of suave assurance, he was none the less a man of ardent, if timid passions. He himself had always been aware of this powerful sensual element in his nature. With a certain degree of courage he had subjected it to a deliberate mortification. Obstinately he had fitted his body to the Procrustean couch that his conscience recommended: obstinately, and in a degree successfully. Not quite successfully . . . for his original appetites were unwieldy, and if they had been coerced in one direction they had undoubtedly and demonstrably overflowed in another, as witnessed the growing expanse of his waistcoat.

This waistcoat, on week-days of broadcloth and on Sundays of a more sensual silk, was the symbol of Mr Leeming's possibilities. He didn't know it. Even if he were aware, in the lacing of his boots, of its physical existence; he hadn't the

least idea of its spiritual significance. If he had realised this, if he had been content to see himself as he actually stood upon the brink of his morning bath instead of as a snowy surpliced priest of God or a knightly figure in the armour of Sir Percivale (such, indeed, was his Christian name), Mr Leeming might have been a healthier and a happier man. As it was, the devil that he believed he had conquered, in reality possessed his soul.

In his quest for the thing which he had labelled purity he had unconsciously allowed the idea of 'Impurity' to become an obsession. In the activities of a parish, hustled by the continual accidents of stark life and stabilised by the actual responsibility of a wife and an increasing family, Mr Leeming might have become a thinner and a wiser man. In the sedentary and monotonous duties of a public school, he had become gradually more fat and introspective, and, as the years advanced, more perpetually conscious of the unashamed presence throughout human nature of his own suppressed desires,—more frightened . . . and more curious . . . of their terrible existence and more terrible power. Mr Leeming, with the best intentions in the world, was in a bad way.

A number of circumstances favoured the development of the unfortunate gentleman's obsession. In the last Easter holidays he had attended a conference of assistant masters in London, at which the whole question had been discussed with the greatest solemnity, and plans had been formulated for the stamping out of 'impurity' in every public school in England. The speeches of the delegates had convinced him of his own

blindness. It was impossible that St Luke's should be so very different from any other public school, yet other people had assured the meeting that in their own schools the disease was 'rampant,' and Mr Leeming had returned to his summer duties convinced that if only he looked with sufficient care more ills than he had ever suspected might be found. He had become a man with a mission.

For a crusade of this kind St Luke's was not by any means an ideal field. The head-master, for all his imposing presence, was not a practical man. He was intolerant of enthusiasms in his staff, not so much because they were symptomatic of ill-breeding, but because they tended to disturb the pleasant ordered tenor of his life. Croquet and botany were sciences of more interest to him than education. He believed in hard games, corporal punishment, nature study, and the classics. He hated extremes. The golden mean was his creed, his weakness, and his apology. He hand't any use for Mr Leeming's intensities. He could even be picturesque on occasion. 'If you are going to appoint yourself inspector of our dirty linen, Leeming,' he said, 'you really mustn't expect me to do the washing.'

'I don't think you understand me, sir,' Mr Leeming began. . . .

'Oh, don't I?' said the Head. The word Impurity formed voicelessly on Mr Leeming's lips.

'It is a scandalous thing . . . scandalous . . .' he complained to the common-room, 'that a man who knows what is right and is determined to follow it shouldn't be properly backed by the head-master. The matter is vital. It is the most important . . . by far the most important problem

in modern education. Any means are justified to purge the schools of this sort of thing. . . .'

'I can see you, Leeming,' drawled Selby, 'in the rôle of *agent provocateur*.' The common-room exploded.

'What is wanted in the public schoolmaster is a higher sense of seriousness,' Leeming spluttered. 'You have no sense of suspicion.'

'What is more wanted in the public schools,' said Cleaver, 'is a suspicion of sense—common sense.'

'All you fellows talk,' said Dr Downton, 'as if the whole thing were a problem for the public schools purely and simply. It's nothing of the kind. It's not the ignorance of the average schoolmaster as much as the ignorance of the average parent. I mean ignorance of the nature of boys . . . lack of sympathy, lack of responsibility. And when ugly things happen they shove it on to us.'

'That's what they pay a hundred and fifty a year for,' said Cleaver.

'Of which we don't see any too much . . .' Selby growled.

'None of you take it seriously. The thing is enormous,' said Leeming. 'What can you expect in a way of improvement when a housemaster like Selby makes jokes about it? I'm convinced that there's only one way. . . . You can't drive boys. You've got to understand their hearts.'

'You've got to understand their bodies,' said Cleaver.

Mr Leeming flushed. 'I think you are merely disgusting, Cleaver.'

'He's quite right,' said Downton. 'It isn't sexual education, it isn't moral instruction that's

going to work the miracle. When a boy reaches a certain age—and it isn't the same age with all boys—he begins to be conscious, and quite properly, of his physical passions. You needn't shudder, Leeming. They exist. You know they exist as well as anybody. Well, when he reaches that stage a public school isn't the proper place for him.'

'The games would go to pot,' said Cleaver. From his point of view there was no more to be said.

'It depends entirely on your boy. Some are too old at seventeen. Some are perfectly safe at nineteen. The trouble is that just when you get them in sight of these dangers you put them in supreme authority. A prefect can do pretty well as he likes. . . .'

'It's the essence of the system . . . responsibility,' said Selby.

'It gives them what Shaw said about something else: the maximum of inclination with the maximum of opportunity.'

'Shaw?' said Cleaver. 'You fellows are too deep for me. Anyway, I don't believe there's much wrong here. So long.' He swung out of the room.

'That kind of man,' said Mr Leeming, 'is at the root of the whole business.'

Dr Downton was almost angry. 'You know, Leeming, you're talking bosh. The thing's solving itself. All over the world schoolboys are getting wider interests at school. In their homes they're taking a more equal place in family life. It is no longer a matter of being seen and not heard. They're being treated like human beings. The more you treat them like human beings the less

likely they are to behave like young animals. And the greatest mistake of all is to keep on talking to them about it. Every boy of a certain age is curious, and quite naturally curious, about his physical possibilities. So is every girl. . . .'

'My dear Downton,' said Leeming flushing, 'I shall be obliged if you won't—er—pursue the subject. You make it painful. . . .'

'Very well,' said Downton gathering up the skirts of his gown.

'Thank you.' Leeming left the room. Selby smiled lazily.

'If only,' he said, 'if only our friend Leeming had ever enjoyed the advantage of a really bad woman's society.'

II

Unconscious of the doom which was being forged for their chastisement in the white heat of Mr Leeming's troubled brain, the school lay scattered along the perimeter of the cricket-field waiting for the players to emerge from the pavilion. They came, and the great expanse of green was made more beautiful by their scattered figures. Everything in the game seemed spacious and smooth and clean—the white flannels of the players; the paler green of the rolled pitch; the new red ball; the sharp click of the bat. Before lunch the school had lost three wickets, but now it seemed as if a stand were to be made. The studious Carr, the head of Edwin's house, was batting steadily; while Gilson, the school's most showy batsman, who would play for Surrey in the holidays, was beginning to get set. Edwin and Widdup had their deck-chairs side by side, and Douglas,

for want of Griffin, absent on some deeper business, had pitched himself near them, reclining upon a positive divan of downy cushions.

The winnings of the house sweepstake, easily gained, and therefore easily to be spent, supplied the natural accompaniment of ices and ginger beer or that inimitable compound of both that was known as the Strawberry Cooler. Under such circumstances the mere fact of lazy existence was a pleasure. Even when the cautious Carr was bowled, the long partnership ended, and the St Luke's wickets began to fall like autumn leaves, the serene beauty of the day was scarcely clouded.

In the middle of the afternoon the figure of Mr Leeming drifted along the edge of the field. He halted on the path immediately in front of Edwin with his back to the spectators, considerably incommoding Douglas's view of the play. 'Old Beelzebub's a friend of yours, isn't he, Ingleby?' said Douglas lazily. 'You might tell him that he isn't made of glass.' But Mr Leeming, suddenly aware of a voice behind him, turned and came towards them, smiling.

'Ah, Ingleby,' he said. 'Is that you?'

He sat on the grass beside them, very carefully, as befitted a man of his figure. 'A beautiful day. Let me see, who are we playing?'

'The M.C.C., sir.'

'Ah, yes . . . the Marylebone Cricket Club. Are you fond of cricket, Ingleby?'

'Of course I am, sir.'

'I very seldom see you now. That's the pity of it. The better a boy is the less you see of him. He passes through your form quickly, and that's the end of it. And how is Widdup?'

Widdup was very well, if a little impatient.

'You and Ingleby are great friends, Widdup. Quite inseparable. I've often see you walking up and down the quad at night. I wonder what it is you have in common, eh?'

Widdup didn't know. They'd always been pals. They'd always slept alongside each other. That was how you got to know a chap.

'Well, Ingleby, what are you reading in these days?'

'Well hit, sir; oh, well hit. . . . Make it five. I beg your pardon, sir . . . I don't think I'm reading anything in particular.'

Slowly it became evident to Mr Leeming that the audience which he had honoured with his company was bored. With great dignity he picked himself up and left them.

'He's a funny old swine,' said Douglas.

'I used to think he was rather decent,' said Edwin. 'Horribly "pi" you know.'

'I don't trust him,' said Douglas. 'I always feel as if he's up to some low-down business or other. He goes mooching about in those old felt slippers of his, and you never know where he is. The other day he came into the long box-room when Griff and I were there playing Nap. You couldn't tell he was coming. He's like a damned old tom-cat. I can't think how you stick him, Ingleby. . . .'

'I don't, really,' Edwin confessed.

'And old Griff says he follows him like a shadow. Just lately he's taken to haunting the swimming-bath. I don't know what he goes there for. He never used to. He never goes in. I don't suppose the fat beast can swim.'

'He could float. . . .' said the practical Widdup.

The golden afternoon dragged out its lovely length. The atmosphere of luxurious indolence

grew so heavy that it became too great an effort to think of carrying the rugs and deck-chairs back to the studies; and when Douglas had left them to keep an appointment with Griffin, Widdup and Edwin sat on till the meadows swam with soft golden light, till the tops of the pyramidal lime-trees became the colour of their blossoms, and the sun cast long shadows upon the yellow fields. In this delightful hour the sounds of the match from which excitement had faded almost as the fierceness had faded from the sky, became no more than a placid accompaniment to the dying day. At six-thirty stumps were drawn. The wide fields began to empty and soon no life was seen upon them but low dipping swallows who skimmed the smooth lawn as though it were the surface of some placid lake. Upon the hill-side a straggling trail of boys could be seen taking home their rugs and cushions as though they were returning from a day of toil instead of one of the most exquisite idleness.

'Come on,' said Widdup at last; 'we shall be late for chapel.' And indeed another twenty minutes found them assembled in the oak pews for evensong. They sang the *Nunc Dimittis*, a canticle which for all the rest of his life Edwin associated with the placid closing of a summer day, and the mild rays of the departing sun blazed through the stained glass of the west window upon the pale mosaic of the nave. When they emerged from the chapel the sun had set, the skyline of the downs lay low and almost cold, and cockchafers were whirring blindly among the sticky tops of the conifers along the chapel path.

In the middle of the crowd that stuck congested in the porch Edwin found himself wedged between

Douglas and Griffin. They whispered together behind his back. 'Well, are you going?'

'Of course I'm going, I told you.'

'You've fixed it up with her?'

'Yes, she's up to any sport. Why don't you come with us?'

'Two's company. . . .'

'Go on with you. . . . You can easily pick up another. You're not a sportsman, Duggie.'

'I don't take risks of that kind. You bet your boots I don't. Why don't you ask Ingleby? He's a blood. Says he went to see the Birches. And he's flush, too. Won the sweep.'

'Ingleby?' Griffin scoffed. 'I bet you he'd funk it.'

'Funk what?' said Edwin.

'Going down town to-night. There's a fair on. I'm taking the skivvy from J dorm. She's all right. She knows a thing or two.'

'Don't talk so loud, you ass,' said Douglas.

'Well, will you come?'

'No, I won't,' said Edwin.

'You said you went to the Birches.'

'I did go to the Birches.'

'Well, nobody believes you. Now's your chance to show your pluck. Come along, gentlemen, show your pluck. . . . Three to one bar one. . . . 'Ere you are, sir. The old and trusted firm. Ingleby . . . you are a rotten little funk!'

Edwin said nothing. 'He's got more sense than you have, anyway, Griff,' said Douglas.

That night in the dormitory when the lights were turned down Griffin had not appeared. Douglas, who slept next to him, had constructed, by means of his own bolster and another confiscated from the bed of the small boy on whom the

animosity of the coalition was now chiefly lavished, a very plausible imitation of Griffin's prostrate figure. As Griffin habitually slept in a position which enabled him to absorb his own fugginess, this was not difficult. When Edwin went to sleep Griffin had not arrived. Drugged with fresh air he slept untroubled by any dream. In the middle of the night (as it seemed) he awoke, not because he had heard any sound but rather because he had become aware in his sleep of some unusual presence. He did not move, but slowly opened his eyes, and all he saw was the figure of Mr Selby, gigantically tall, clad in a long bath-gown of Turkish towelling and carrying a lighted candle that cast a shadow even more gigantic on the whitewashed walls. He moved slowly and his bedroom slippers made no sound on the boarded floor. Opposite the foot of Edwin's and Widdup's bed he paused for a moment. Edwin closed his eyes. He felt the eyelids quiver. Why on earth should Selby want to look at him? He passed on, and Edwin, cautiously opening his eyes, saw him pause again opposite the gap between Douglas and Griffin. At this point he waited longer. He appeared to be thinking. He passed on and then suddenly turned back and gently lifted the sheet from Griffin's pillow. Gently he replaced it. Edwin was almost too sleepy to realise that Griffin wasn't there; but when he did, the first thought which came into his mind was one of spontaneous and inexplicable loyalty. He thought, 'Poor old Griff: He's in for it.' And yet, if there was one person in the world against whom he had a reasonable excuse for hatred . . . Very silently Selby left the dormitory. Edwin became conscious of the ghostly noises of the night: a nightjar spinning

in the wood at the back of the Schoolhouse : the boom of a cockchafer that some enthusiast had captured and imported into the dormitory. The clock in the high turret struck twelve. The chime wandered clanging over the empty quadrangle.

III

The next week was the most sensational that had ever shaken the placid life of St Luke's. The fall of Griffin was no startling matter—deliberately he had been 'asking for it,' and the escapade of the fair in race-week was no more than a crowning glory. Still, it was an impressive affair. Immediately after breakfast next morning it was whispered that Griffin had been sent to the infectious ward in the sanatorium, which was always devoted, by reason of its size rather than any conscious attempt at symbolism, to the isolation of moral leprosy. It became certain—and Edwin, after his vision of Selby's visit in the night had taken it for granted—that Griffin was to be 'bunked.' In the afternoon, Douglas, faithfully prowling near his comrade's prison, had seen Griffin, splendidly unrepentant, at the high window of his condemned cell. Griffin had smiled. Griffin, evidently, didn't give a damn for the whole business. The house thrilled. Of such stuff heroes were made. It remained to be seen, in the opinion of the critical, how Griffin would shape in the supreme test of the scaffold on which he would probably be birched before the assembled school. The betting was all on Griffin's being a sportsman.

There followed a day of suspense. Consultations between masters were noticed. Selby, for a whole

hour, had been closeted with the Head. Old fat Leeming had been sent for at last to join their deliberations. What had Leeming to do with it? Other housemasters had been summoned to the room beneath the clock and emerged with unusually serious faces. Who was this Griffin that his fate should shake the foundations of Olympus? The Head, indeed, showed his seriousness more clearly than all the others. He arrived late in chapel, where the service had waited on his coming: he stalked up the aisle, as full of omen as any black crow, with his pale seamed face and his shaggy black beard, and his arms crossed behind his back beneath the skirts of his gown. From his high seat at the end of the chancel he scowled on the whole school as if he hated it. At supper a message was read out. The school would assemble by classes in the Big Schoolroom at noon. Poor old Griff. . . . The sergeant, it was said, had been seen binding a new birch in the porter's lodge.

It was all very romantic and thrilling. Edwin, conscious now for the first time of the extreme foolhardiness of his racecourse adventure, felt himself a greater dog than ever. And then, when the stage was set, and the audience attuned to an atmosphere of tragedy by so much thunder-weather, Griffin, from whom the glamour of the heroic had been gradually fading in the shame of his captivity, achieved the dramatic. He bolted. With a ladder of knotted sheets he climbed down the waterspout and disappeared into open country. Griffin lived somewhere in Kent. In half a day he would reach home.

For Selby's house it was a great morning. Edwin, in spite of his hatred of Griffin, shared in the general elation. Such private feuds were

small concerns in the face of the common enemy. Douglas was flown with insolence.

'I knew old Griff would do them,' he said. 'By God . . . that's a man if you like. It's the nastiest knock old Selby's had in his life. Think of it . . . a chap with a weak heart like old Griff shinning down a waterspout!'

Edwin wondered if the meeting in the Big Schoolroom would be off, or whether, perhaps, it would be postponed and Griffin hauled back from the bosom of his family to go through with it.

'You silly ass,' said Douglas. 'Of course they can't fetch him back. He's done them brown.'

But the morning went on without any alteration in the programme. At twelve o'clock the solemn procession began: the whole black-coated population of St Luke's filtering through narrow corridors and the wide folding doors into the big Schoolroom. The whole business was impressive; for nobody spoke and no sound came from the crowd but the drag of slowly-moving feet and arms that brushed one another. They were like a flock of sheep driven away from market on a narrow road between dusty hedges, for none of them knew what was coming. Rumour was busy with whispers.

Griffin had been found in a ditch with his leg broken and had been hauled back to fulfil his sentence. Like Monmouth, Edwin thought. Griffin, in company with the pale skivvy from 'D' had been arrested by the police at Waterloo. Other rumours, less credible, as, for instance, that Cleaver, meeting a jockey friend of his in a little pub called the Grenadier in the Downs Road, had walked into a taproom full of School House bloods on Sunday morning. Indeed, these were strenuous days.

The school settled down. The Head, lean, crowlike, flapped the wings of his gown. He seemed to find it difficult to make a beginning, and while he waited for a word his left arm twitched. Then he began. It was obvious that his pause had been nothing more than a rhetorical trick designed to fix the attention of an audience already thrilled by uncertainty. He wasn't at a loss for words at all. He boomed, he ranted, he bellowed, he rolled his 'r's' and his eyes. The masters, sitting at their high desks remained discreet and rather bored . . . all except Mr Leeming, to whom the orator appeared as an inspired prophet of God. For the subject of his harangue was Mr Leeming's own: Impurity; and the whole meeting the immediate result of Mr Leeming's investigations. The curtain had gone up with a most theatrical flourish upon the Great Smut Row.

The essence of the Head's speech was a general threat. Certain things had been discovered; certain further inquiries were to be made; the fate of a large number of boys lay in the balance; more details were known, in all probability, than any of the victims suspected; to the youngest among them he made a special appeal; confession, immediate confession, would be the better part of valour; he looked to every member of the school to aid him in the task, the sacred duty, of purging St Luke's of this abominable thing. Indeed it is possible that he meant what he said. His port was bad, and he knew better than to drink it; but the heady vintage that he brewed from sonorous words knocked him over every time.

The meeting dissolved in silence. For the moment

the school was impressed, less by the gravity of the charge than by its indefiniteness. The same evening brought tales of segregated suspects, of tearful and terrible interviews in the rooms of housemasters, of prefects suspended: of a veritable reign of terror—*lettres de cachet* and the rest of it—in Citizen Leeming's house. 'D' dormitory and the others in charge of the languid Selby suffered least. When evening came to set a term to rumours only two were missing—the black Douglas, and an insignificant inky creature of the name of Hearn, whom the threats of the headmaster had driven to some grubby confession. An atmosphere of immense relief fell upon the awed dormitory and found vent in a memorable 'rag.'

But Edwin did not sleep. There was no reason why he should not have slept; but he couldn't help feeling, against reason, that in some way he might be dragged into the toils of vengeance; that some peculiar combination of circumstances might implicate him in the business, even though he had never had anything to do with it. Somehow appearances might be against him. In particular he became suspicious of Mr Leeming's attentions to him in the past. He imagined that the wily creature had suspected him, and tried, for that reason, to find a way into his confidence. What other explanation could there be? His avoidance of Mr Leeming could only have increased the suspicion. Plainly, he was done for.

He remembered, with a perilous clearness, words that had passed between them to which he had given no thought. Now they appeared terribly significant. 'You and Ingleby are great friends, Widdup,' Leeming had said only a few days before.

'Quite inseparable. I've often seen you walking up and down the quad at night. I wonder what you have in common, eh?' Now Edwin knew why he wondered. And Widdup, like a damned fool, had said that they slept alongside each other. Supposing old Leeming imagined. . . . It was too bad. He lay there staring at the rafters and wondering what could be done. He would like to write to his mother about it. But a man couldn't write to his mother about a thing like that. And his father wouldn't understand. In the end he determined that the only thing he could possibly do was to go and see Leeming next day and assure him that there was nothing wrong with their friendship. 'And then,' he thought, 'the old beast won't believe me. He'll think that I've gone to him because I have a guilty conscience, and he'll suspect me more than ever. He'll go and make all sorts of inquiries and something will come out that will be difficult to explain.' How could anything come out when there wasn't anything wrong? He could not give a reasonable answer to this question, and yet he was afraid. From this spiritual purgatory of his own making he passed into an uneasy sleep.

Next morning, in the middle of early school, the sergeant entered with a message for Mr Cleaver, and waited while the master read it.

'Ingleby,' he said at last, 'Mr Selby wants to speak to you. You had better go at once.'

Edwin packed up his books with trembling hands. He went very white. It seemed to him that the eyes of the whole form were on him. They were thinking, 'Hallo, here's another of them. Ingleby! Who would have thought it?' He heard the footsteps of the sergeant go echoing

down the corridor as steadily and implacably as the fate that was overtaking him. He only wanted to get it over. As soon as he was out of the classroom he ran, for every moment of uncertainty was torture to him. He ran across the quad and climbed the stairs, breathless, to the low room still steeped in stale honeydew, where his life at St Luke's had begun and must now so abruptly end. Mr Selby sat at his desk waiting for him. When Edwin entered the room he looked suddenly embarrassed and fingered an envelope on his desk.

'Ingleby, I sent for you urgently . . .'

'Yes, sir.'

'It probably came as a shock to you . . . or perhaps you were prepared?'

'No, sir.'

'Then you must pull yourself together. You can't guess what it is?'

'No, sir.' . . . But he could. It came to him suddenly, huge and annihilating, swamping in the space of a second all the uneasiness and terror that had shadowed him in the night. Those things were nothing . . . nothing.

'Oh, sir . . . my mother . . .'

'Yes . . . It's your mother, Ingleby. I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news. Very sorry. . . .'

'Tell me, sir. She's dead. Oh . . . she's dead . . .?'

Mr Selby unfolded the telegram although he already knew its contents.

'No. It's not so bad as that. But she's ill . . . very ill . . .'

'I knew. . . . The minute you spoke I knew, sir. . . .'

'You had better catch the eight o'clock train

at the Downs station. You need only take your little bag. You can get it from the matron.'

'Yes, sir. . . .'

'Have you any money?' Mr Selby almost smiled to see him so eager to go.

'No, sir. . . . Only about eightpence.'

'You can't go without money, you know. Here's a sovereign. Now, cheer up, there's a good fellow. Cheer up!' He smiled wanly, and Edwin burst into tears. Mr Selby laid an awkward hand on his shoulder. It was very decent of him, Edwin thought, as he stood with his fists in his eyes, one of them clutching the sovereign that Selby had given him.

'Thank you, sir . . . but it's awful, it's awful. . . .'

'Of course, of course. . . .'

He shepherded Edwin out of the room. When the boy had gone, Mr Selby, an unemotional man, tore the telegram into small pieces and placed them, with a confirmed bachelor's tidiness, in the waste-paper basket. Then he lit a pipe of honey-dew; and the blue smoke from the bowl together with the brown smoke that he expelled from his nostrils shone cheerily in the morning sun that beat through the latticed window on to a woman's photograph standing on the desk in front of him. For a moment he gazed at the faded image. He had not thought of her for years.

CHAPTER VIII

HOMEWARDS

In a morning air of miraculous freshness Edwin left the quad by the iron gates on the eastern side. The square was quite empty, for all its usual inhabitants were now in early school. He noticed an unusual aspect of space and cleanliness. He could not remember ever having seen it empty before. He noticed the tuck-shop in the corner by the swimming-bath. This, too, was closed, and the windows were heavily shuttered. It was a small thing, but it suddenly occurred to him that people put up their shutters or pulled down their blinds when some one lay dead in a house. It seemed to him like a sort of omen. He said to himself, 'I must think of something else . . . I must think of something else. I can't bear it.' The only other time when he had ever thought of death had been a single moment a week or so before when his mother had written about her plan of a visit to Switzerland. And then the thought had been no more than an indefinite shadow, too remote to be threatening. Now it was different. The threat was ponderable and vast. 'Death . . . I mustn't think of it. I must think of something else.'

He had to think of something else; for by the time the gate clanged behind him the clock in the tower struck the quarter, and he knew that he had barely time to catch his train. With his bag in his hand he started running up the road between the tufted grassy banks; past the scene of his

last adventure, the oak paling beside the nightingale's spinney, past the last of the new villas, and so, on to the open downs. It was a strange adventure for him to reach them so early in the morning. Their turf was silvered still with a fine dew that made it even paler than a chalk down should be. Fold beyond beautiful fold they stretched before him. The woody belts of beech and pine lay veiled in milky mist, and the air which moved to meet him, as it seemed, over that expanse of breathing grass, was of an intoxicating coolness and sweetness which went to his head and made him want to shout or sing. The spring of a summer morning in the spring of life! It was all wrong. Surely no awful devastation of death could overshadow such an ecstasy of physical happiness? He refused to believe it. It was all fantastic nonsense. Of course she wasn't dead. Your mother couldn't die without your feeling it. . . .

At the station he had five minutes to spare. He changed his sovereign, and was relieved to be rid of the responsibility of one coin, and to fill his pocket with silver. There were several coppers in the change, and these he placed in a penny-in-the-slot machine, extracting several metallic ingots of chocolate cream. He was ready for these at once, for his only breakfast had been a hurried cup of tea and a slice of bread and butter in the matron's room. The train jolted out of the station, and soon he was travelling eastward with the high water-tower of St Luke's dipping gradually beneath a long horizon.

The morning grew more beautiful. In some strange way its beauty seemed to have got into his blood; for he tingled with a kind of mild

ecstasy which he couldn't help feeling unsuitable —almost irreverent, to the tragic occasion. There was adventure in it and the added charm of the unexpected. He was going home. Surely it was reasonable enough to be excited at such a prospect as that, to smell the fine summer scents that were so different in a midland shire; to see the gorse ablaze on Pen Beacon and Uffdown and the green glades of the old Mercian wood. Of course it was always wonderful to be going home.

He remembered other homecomings from St Luke's; the first, and best of all, when, on a December morning they had crowded into the housemaster's room where Mr Selby sat in his dressing-gown, with a gaslight flaring, handing out the little paper packets of travelling money; how the damp platform at the station had been crowded with human happiness and such a holiday spirit of independence that Griffin and Douglas had lighted cigarettes while they waited for the train. That was the town station. He reflected that he had only once before been to the Downs, where the train service, except on race days, was not so good; that had been on the occasion of his first visit to St Luke's for the scholarship exam. He had come down in an Eton suit, fortunately correct, and an unfortunate topper that he would have given his life to hide when he found that they were not worn. And his mother had come down with him. At the thought of her the old numbing dread fell upon his heart. Perhaps this was the very carriage in which they had travelled. He remembered the journey so well: how she had sat in the right-hand corner, with her face to the engine, wearing a tailor-made grey coat and skirt, a velvet hat and a veil. He

had been looking at her rather critically, for he was anxious that she should seem what she was —the most beautiful creature in the world. And when he was looking at her with this in his mind she had smiled at him, for no other reason in the world probably but that she loved him; and with that smile he had been satisfied that she really was beautiful. And he had noticed how lovely her hands were when she took her gloves off. . . . Now, the memory of the moment made him want to cry, just as the beauty of the morning made him full of exultation. It was a most perilous mixture of emotions.

By this time the region of downs had been left far behind. They were gliding, more smoothly, it seemed, through the heavily-wooded park country of the home counties. Stations became more frequent, and the train began to fill with business people hurrying to London for their morning's work. They settled themselves in their carriages as though they were confident that their seats had been reserved for them. They were all rather carefully, rather shabbily dressed: the cuffs of their coats were shiny, and the cuffs of their shirts fringed, and one of them, a gentleman with a top-hat half-covered by a mourning-band, wore cuff-covers of white paper. They all read their morning papers and rarely spoke; but when they did speak to each other they used an almost formal respect in their addresses which implied that they were all respectable, God-fearing people with responsibilities and semi-detached houses. Edwin they ignored—not so much as a wilful intrusion as an unfortunate accident. He began to feel ashamed that, by starting from the terminus, he had occupied a corner seat to

which the gentleman with the paper cuffs had an inalienable right.

In a little while the villas from which this population had emerged began to creep closer to the track, and by the seventh station their backs were crowding close to the embankment with long, narrow gardens in which the crimson rambler rose seemed to have established itself like a weed. The houses, too, or rather the backs of them, grew more uniform, being all built with bricks of an unhealthy yellow or putty colour. Soon there were no more buildings semi-detached. The endless rows seemed to be suffering some process of squeezing or constriction that made them coalesce and edged them closer and closer to the railway line. Soon the gardens grew so small that there was no room in them for green things, only for a patch of black earth occupied by lean cats, and posts connected by untidy pieces of rope on which torn laundry was hung out to collect the smuts or flap drearily in a night of drizzle. Then the gardens went altogether; and the beautiful and natural love of green things showed itself in sodden window-boxes full of languishing geranium cuttings or mignonette. The very atmosphere seemed to have been subjected to the increasing squeeze; for the mild air of the downs had here a yellow tinge as though it were being curdled. To complete the process the train plunged, at last, into a sulphurous tunnel, emerging amid acrid fumes in a sort of underground vault where the door was opened by a ticket-collector with a red tie, tired already, who shouted 'Tickets, please.'

None of the respectable suburban gentlemen took any notice of him, for by purchasing

season tickets they had rendered themselves immune from his attentions; but he glared at Edwin, and Edwin passed him his ticket, which was handed on as if it were a curiosity and a rather vulgar possession by the gentlemen on his side of the compartment. The door was slammed. The man with the top-hat placed it carefully on his head and adjusted the paper cuffs. Others folded their morning papers and put them in their pockets. One, apparently recognising a friend who was sitting opposite to him, for the first time, said 'Good-morning,' and the train passed amid thunderous echoes under the arch and into Victoria Station. All his fellow-passengers were adepts at evacuation, and before he knew where he was Edwin was alone in the carriage.

He was very lonely and yet, somehow, a little important. Usually, at term end, he had crossed London with Widdup, whose westward train also started from Paddington. He hailed a hansom, and one that was worthy of its name: a shining chariot, all coach-builders' varnish, with yellow wheels and polished brass door-handles and clean straw that smelt of the stable on its floor. The cabman was youngish, mahogany-complexioned, and ready to be facetious. He called Edwin 'My lord,' and Edwin hardly knew whether to treat him seriously or not. 'Geawing to the races, my lord?' he said. The Lord knew Edwin had had enough of races for a bit. He said 'Paddington.' 'Ascot or Newbury?' said the cabby, climbing to his seat.

It was a great moment. The movement was all so swift and luxurious, the hansom so delicately sprung that it swayed gently with the horse's motion. The polished lamps on either side were

filled with wedding rosettes. Inside on either hand were oblong mirrors in which Edwin could almost see his own profile: a subject of endless curiosity. There was even a little brass receptacle for cigar-ash. A Cunarder of a cab! The cabby whistled 'Little Dolly Daydreams' with a ravishing tremolo. The cab, which had jolted a trifle on the setts of the station-yard, passed among a flight of feeding pigeons out of the iron gates into the bowling smoothness of the Palace Road. My word, this was life. . . . Life! . . . Perhaps she was dead already. Oh, why should a day like this be marred?

It seemed to him, after a moment's thought, that it was possible—even if it were wrong—to be possessed by two and opposite emotions at once. He was miserable to feel an alarm which wasn't exactly definite or real, and yet he could not help enjoying this astounding and unforeseen adventure, 'If I *do* feel like that,' he thought, 'it can't be exactly wrong.' And that comforted him.

He surrendered himself to the joys of the morning. The streets were so wide and clean, the green fringe of the park so pleasant: through the railings he could see men and women on horseback taking an early ride, enjoying, like him, the coolness of the morning air. He wondered at the great white stucco houses of Park Lane, standing back from the wide pavement with an air of pompous reticence. Before one of them, remnant of a summer dance the night before, a tented portico, striped with red and white, overstretched the pavement. Edwin did not know what kind of people lived in these houses, but in the light of this morning it seemed to him that

theirs must be an existence of fabulous happiness, all clean and bright and shining as the morning itself or the rubber-tired hansom, spinning along with its yellow spokes beside the neat park railings. All of them were surely exalted, splendid creatures, born to great names and a clear-cut way of life without the least complication, dowered with a kind of instinctive physical cleanliness.

At the corner, by Marble Arch, the hansom cab, silent but for its jolly jingling bells, nearly ran over an old gentleman in a frock coat with an exquisite white stock and a noble nose. His name was probably Cohen; but Edwin thought he must be at least an Earl.

Once again the resorts of elegance were left behind. The hansom, heaving heavily, was checked on the slope of the gradient descending to the departure platform at Paddington. Opposite the booking-office it stopped, and Edwin was released from this paradisaical loosebox. The cabby, wishing him the best of luck at Goodwood, patted his horse, whom he had christened Jeddah, and climbed up again to his seat whistling divinely. Edwin was disgorged upon the long platform at Paddington that rumbled with the sound of many moving trollies below a faint hiss of escaping steam, and smelt, as he had always remembered it, of sulphur mingled with axle grease and the peculiar odour that hangs about tin milk-cans. He was thankful to be free of it, sitting in the corner of a third-class carriage opposite a stout woman with eyes that looked as if she had been crying all night, and a heavy black veil, whose hat was surmounted by coloured photographs of the Memorial Theatre at Stratford and Brixham Trawlers waiting for a Breeze.

This train ran out of London more easily than the other had entered it. The area of painful constriction seemed more narrow, and in an incredibly short time he found himself gliding along the Thames valley with the ghostly round tower of Windsor Castle on his left.

At Reading, where the sidings of the biscuit factory reminded him of teas which he had 'brewed' with Widdup, the woman opposite took out a crumpled paper bag, and began to eat sandwiches. She lifted her veil to do so, and the process suddenly proclaimed her human. Edwin saw that she wasn't, as he had imagined, a sombre, mute-like creature, but a woman of middle age with a comfortable face and a methodical appetite.

He began to wonder what he should say if she offered him a sandwich, for he dreaded the idea of accepting anything from a stranger, and at the same time could not deny that he was awfully hungry, for the chocolate creams that he had absorbed at the Downs station had failed to dull his normal appetite. This emergency, however, never arose. The woman in black worked steadily through her meal, and when she had finished her packet of sandwiches folded the paper bag tidily and placed it in a wicker travelling basket, from which she produced one of those flask-shaped bottles in which spirits are sold at railways stations. From this she took a prolonged and delicious gulp; recorked and replaced it, smiled to herself, sighed, and lowered her portcullis once more.

It cheered Edwin to think that she wasn't as inhuman and sinister as he had imagined; and in a little while he saw beneath her veil that she had closed her eyes and was gradually falling asleep. The sun, meanwhile, was climbing towards

the south, and the railway carriage began to reflect the summery atmosphere of the green and pleasant land through which the train was passing. It made golden the dust on the window-pane at Edwin's elbow and discovered warm colours in the pile of the russet cloth with which the carriage was upholstered.

It was a country of green woods and fields of ripening mowing-grass from which the sound of a machine could sometimes be heard above the rumble of the train. It all seemed extraordinarily peaceful. A cuckoo passed in level flight from one of the hedgerow elms to the dark edge of a wood. In the heart of the wood itself a straight green clearing appeared. It reminded Edwin of the green roads that pierced the woods below Uffdown, and he remembered, poignantly, the walk with his mother in the Easter holidays when they had reached the crown of the hills at sunset. Some day, they had said, they would make that journey again. Some day . . . perhaps never. Was it quite impossible to get away from that threatening shadow? But even while he was thinking how unreasonable and how cruel the whole business was, another sight fell upon his eyes and filled him with a new and strange excitement: a small cluster of spires set in a city of pale smoke, and one commanding dome. He held his breath. He knew that it was Oxford.

This, then, was the city of his dreams. Here, in a little while, he would find himself living the new life of leisure, and spaciousness and culture which had become his chief ambition. This was his Mecca: 'That lovely city with her dreaming spires,' he whispered to himself. It was indeed merciful that the vision of his second dream should

come to cheer him when the first became so perilously near extinction.

Even when the train began to slow down among red-brick suburbs of an appalling ugliness the mood of excitement had not faded. The train ran in smoothly, and the woman in black awoke and blew her nose. Edwin, looking out of the carriage window, saw a congregation of demigods in grey flannel trousers, celestial socks, and tweed Norfolk coats lounging with a grace that was Olympian upon the platform. All of them, he thought, were supremely happy. In this holy city happiness had her dwelling. One of them—his back was turned to Edwin—reminded him of Layton, the old head of the house. He remembered with a thrill, that Layton, who had won a scholarship at New College, was now in Oxford. Of course it must be he. Very excited, Edwin slipped out of the carriage and ran after him. 'Layton!' he called. And the young man looked round. 'What do you want?' he said. It wasn't Layton at all. Edwin apologised. 'I'm awfully sorry. I thought you were a chap I knew.'

The porters were slamming the doors and he only just managed to scramble into his seat before the train started. The woman in black spoke for the first time. She had a soothing voice, with a west-country burr that reminded him of his father and Widdup. 'I thought you were going to be left behind,' she said. 'I saw your bag was labelled North Bromwich.'

Shouts were heard on the platform. 'North Bromwich next stop. . . . Next stop North Bromwich . . .' Edwin sat down panting, and the train moved off. 'Next stop North Bromwich. . . .' The words echoed in his brain, and

chilled him. He didn't want to look back to see the last of Oxford. Next stop North Bromwich. At North Bromwich he would know the worst. Swiftly, inevitably, the train was carrying him towards it. The tragedy had to be faced.

He was seized with a sudden inconsolable fear of desolation. His eyes brimmed with tears so that the coloured landscape could not be seen any longer. The tears gathered and fell. He could feel them trickling down his cheeks, and when he knew that he could not hold them back any longer the strain of his emotion was too strong for him, and, against his will, he sobbed aloud, burying his face in his hands.

The woman in black, hearing the sobs, raised her veil and looked at him.

'What is it, my dear?' she said.

'Oh, nothing . . . nothing.'

'Folks don't cry about nothing. . . .'

She spoke quite kindly, and her kindness was too much for him. It gave him quite an unaccountable feeling of relief to speak about it.

'It's . . . it's my mother,' he said.

'There now. . . . Is it really? That's bad for 'ee. When did she pass away?'

'She isn't dead. I . . . I hope she isn't. But she's awfully ill.'

'Don't cry now, boy. While there's life there's hope. I always tells them that.'

'Who do you tell that to?'

The black woman laughed. 'Who do I tell that to? Ha . . . that's a good 'un. Why, dearie, my patients, of course.'

'I don't understand. . . . What sort of patients?'

'Well, Mr Inquisitive, if you must know, I'm a monthly nurse.'

Still Edwin did not understand. He asked,—

'Do many of them die?'

'Why, bless my heart, no. It's more a matter of births than deaths. Not that I haven't a' seen deaths. *And* laid them out. But I'll tell you something. It's my belief that they all die happy. And though it's hard on a young boy like you to lose his best friend—that's his mother—it's my belief that death is a happy release. Yes, a happy release. I always tell them that. Especially after a long illness. I wonder, has your dear mother been ill for a long time?'

Edwin thought. 'Yes.'

'Perhaps,' said the black woman with relish, 'Perhaps you could give me some idea of what she was suffering from and then I could tell you near enough.'

'I think,' said Edwin, 'it was diabetes.'

'Diabetes . . . think of that! I've a' had several with that. It's a bad complaint. Very. I'm afraid I can't give you the hopes that I'd like to.'

'But don't they ever get better?' Edwin asked in agony. 'I expect they do sometimes, don't they?'

'It all goes to sugar,' said the woman enigmatically. 'I ought to know for I've had them. Yes . . . I've had them. But while there's life there's hope. That's what I always say. And a boy's best friend is his mother. You must never forget her.'

'I couldn't forget her. Oh, I wish you'd never told me,' said Edwin, sobbing once more.

'Now, dearie, don't take on so. You mustn't take on so. You must take what God gives you. I always tell them that.'

'I won't take what God gives me,' he cried. 'I won't. I can't bear to lose her.'

'Ssh. . . . You mustn't say that. It's wicked to say that; I should be frightened to be struck dead myself if I said a thing like that in God's hearing.'

She looked nervously at the luggage rack above her head as if she expected to find the Almighty in hiding there. Edwin followed the direction of her glance and read: '*This rack is provided for light articles only it must not be used for heavy luggage.*' He wondered inconsequently, whether the stop, which was missing, should come before or after the word 'only.'

'You must cheer up, dearie,' said the black woman soothingly. 'While there's life . . .'

Edwin wished she would shut up. He was sorry that she had ever spoken, and yet he couldn't quite suppress a desire to be further informed on certain technical details which this authority had at her finger-tips. 'Is it a painful death?' he asked slowly, wiping away the last of his tears.

'Painful? . . . Well . . . not to say painful. Not as painful as some. Most of mine passed away in their sleep like. And they look so peaceful and happy. It's a great consolation to their friends. Just like a doll, they look. That's better. You mustn't cry. That's a brave boy. Upon my word, even though I'm used to it, it's quite upset me talking to you.' She gave a little laugh and dived once more for the bottle of spirits. 'This wouldn't be no use to you,' she said, as she took a swig.

Edwin shook his head.

'Every woman has a mother's feelings. And I know what they go through. I understand. I do. Now, that's right. Cheer up and be a good lad. Hope for the best. That's what I tell them. . . .'

'This rack is intended for light articles only. It must not be used for heavy luggage. This rack is intended for light articles. Only it must not be used for heavy luggage. While there's life there's hope. While there's life there's hope. While there's life there's hope.'

So, in the pitiful whirl of Edwin's brain, foolish words re-echoed, and in the end the empty phrase seemed to attach itself to the regular beat of the train's rhythm as the wheels rolled over the joints in the rails. Mesmerised by the formula he only dimly realised that they were now roaring, under a sky far paler and less blue, towards the huge pall of yellowish atmosphere beneath which the black country sweltered.

Soon the prim small gardens told that they were touching the tentacles of a great town. A patch of desert country, scarred with forgotten workings in which water reflected the pale sky, and scattered with heaps of slag. A pair of conical blast furnaces standing side by side and towering above the black factory sheds like temples of some savage religion, as indeed they were. Gloomy canal wharfs, fronting on smoke-blackened walls where leaky steam-pipes, bound with asbestos, hissed. The exhaust of a single small engine, puffing regular jets of dazzling white steam, seen but not heard. A canal barge painted in garish colours, swimming in yellow water, foul with alkali refuse. A disused factory with a tall chimney on which the words Harris and Co., Brass Founders, was painted in vertical letters which the mesmeric eye must read. Another mile of black desert, pools, and slag heaps, and ragged children flying kites. Everywhere a vast debris of rusty iron, old wheels, corroded

boilers, tubes writhen and tangled as if they had been struck by lightning. An asphalt school-yard on a slope, with a tall, gothic school and children screaming their lungs out, but silent to Edwin's ears. Endless mean streets of dusky brick houses with roofs of purple slate and blue brick foot-paths. Dust and an acrid smell as of smoking pit heaps. More houses, and above them, misty, and almost beautiful, the high clock tower of the Art Gallery. A thunderous tunnel. . . . The clamour of the wheels swelled to an uproar. 'While there's life there's hope. While there's life there's hope.' Under the gloom of the great glass roof the train emerged.

'Good-bye, dearie,' said the black woman, smiling. 'I hope it's not as bad as you think. You never know. Don't forget your bag, now.'

He could easily have done so.

CHAPTER IX

THE DARK HOUSE

I

Aunt Laura was waiting for him on the platform. It was a very strange sensation. Always at other times when he had come home from St Luke's his mother had met him at North Bromwich, and even now it seemed natural to look for her, to pick out her fragile figure from all the others on the platform, and then to kiss her cool face through her veil. On these occasions neither of them would speak, but he would see her eyes smiling and full of love looking him all over, drowning him in their particular kindness. Aunt Laura was a poor substitute. To-day she was a little more diffuse and emotional than usual, and at the same time curiously kinder. She kissed him—her lips were hot—and he felt that the kiss was really nothing more than an attempt to conceal an entirely different emotion and to hide her eyes. On his cheek her lips trembled. He dared not look at her for he was afraid that in her eyes he would be able to read the worst. It had to be faced. At last he managed to say,—

'How is she?'

And above the roar of the station he heard an uncertain voice answer. 'She's very ill, Eddie . . . very ill indeed.'

'Not dead? . . . she's not dead?'

'No, no. We must all be brave, Eddie.'

'We must all be brave.' . . . He hated to hear

her talk like that. What had she to be brave about? It wasn't her mother who was dying, only her sister. A sister wasn't like a mother. It was all very well to say these conventional things. He didn't believe she really meant them. She could cry her eyes out before he'd believe her, however kind she might try to be. It wasn't any good her trying to be kind now. She hadn't been kind to his mother. He remembered the day when her callousness had made his mother cry. He couldn't pity her now; he couldn't put up with her condolences; he believed he hated her. He would hate any one in the world who had given his mother a moment's pain. She was so little and beautiful and perfect. . . .

And yet, when he sat opposite to Aunt Laura in the Halesby train, and examined her more closely, he could see for himself that the strain of the last few days had somehow chastened her —she seemed to have lost some of her florid assurance, and her eyes looked as if she had been crying. She even seemed to have shrunk a little. And this made matters worse, for it seemed to him that the very thing which had obliterated what he most disliked in her had also accentuated the family likeness. All the time, beneath this face, which he distrusted, he could see a faint and tantalising resemblance to the other face that he adored. If any one had suggested to him that Aunt Laura was in any way like his mother, he would have denied it indignantly; but the likeness was there, a curious, torturing likeness of feature. He didn't know then what in after years he was to realise time after time: that grief has a way of suppressing individual characteristics and reducing the faces of a whole suffering family

to their original type after the manner of a composite photograph. It was tantalising, and so harrowing that he dared not look at her any longer.

At Halesby they walked up from the station together almost without speaking. The little house on the edge of the country wore a strangely tragic air. Downstairs all was quiet. After the big echoing rooms at St Luke's it seemed ridiculously small. Nobody inhabited the rooms, and the soft carpet created a curious hushed atmosphere in which it seemed sacrilege to speak in anything but a whisper. Aunt Laura took off her hat and veil.

'I'd better carry my bag upstairs,' said Edwin. He felt somehow, that in his little old room he could be happier. He could even, if he wanted to, throw himself on the bed and give way to the tears which were bound to come.

'No . . . you'd better wait here,' said Aunt Laura. 'Your father is sleeping in your room. You see it wouldn't do for him to be in hers. He's been there for three nights. And I'm in the spare room. I think you're going to sleep over at Mrs Barrow's.'

Edwin flamed with jealousy. What was Aunt Laura doing in the house? She, above all people, had no right to be there.

'But I could sleep on the sofa in the drawing-room,' he said.

'You mustn't make difficulties, Eddie. It's all arranged. The specialist has been out this afternoon to see her with Dr Moorhouse. He may be upstairs now.'

'But I can't, I can't be so far away. I ought to be here. She would like me to be here.'

'Eddie, dear . . . do be a good boy. Here comes your father.'

And his father came. Strangely, strangely old and worn he looked in the shabby alpaca coat. Edwin had never realised that he could be so pathetic. He smiled at Edwin, a smile that was unutterably painful. 'Eddie . . . my boy,' he said, and kissed him, 'I'm glad you've come. . . . She was anxious for you to come. . . .'

'Oh, father. . . .'

'We must all be brave, Eddie.' Again that terrible smile.

'Father, may I go and see her. . . .?'

'The doctor says that nobody had better see her to-night.'

'Yes, Eddie, we must obey the doctor's orders, dear,' said Aunt Laura.

'But *you've* seen her . . . you saw her this morning, didn't you?'

'That was different,' said Aunt Laura. 'I was up all night with her.'

'It isn't different, is it, father? Aunt Laura's nothing to her. . . .'

'Eddie, Eddie. . . .' Aunt Laura protested.

'Father, if she asked for me she ought to see me. . . .'

'She's so ill, Eddie. I'm afraid she wouldn't know you.'

'Oh, I'm sure she would. . . .'

'Edwin, you mustn't worry your father; there's a good boy.'

'Oh, Aunt Laura . . .' then fiercely, 'She's *my* mother. . . .'

Edwin's father sighed and looked away. Aunt Laura, with a business-like change of tone which implied that Edwin's question was disposed of, whispered to his father, 'Is she still sleeping?'

'Yes. . . . The doctor says it isn't really sleep, it's coma.'

Coma . . . a gloomy and terrible word! What did it mean? Edwin remembered the woman in the train. 'Most of them pass away in their sleep like.'

'I think I'll go and lie down for an hour,' said his father.

'Yes, do, John,' said Aunt Laura encouragingly. 'You need it. I'll go upstairs myself to be handy if the nurse wants anything.'

This was the first that Edwin had heard of a nurse. The idea inspired him with awe. His father sighed and turned to go.

'Father . . . can't I go up, only for a minute?'

Aunt Laura, who had taken upon herself the rôle of protectress and manager of the distressed household, intervened,—

'Eddie, you mustn't worry your father. We're all in trouble, and you mustn't be a nuisance.'

His father went, without speaking.

'Well, when can I see her?' Edwin demanded.

'To-morrow. . . . You must be patient like the rest of us. Now I must go upstairs. You'll be quiet, won't you? Mrs Barrow has your bedroom ready, and if you take your bag over she'll give you some tea. She promised to look after you. She was most kind. Or, if you like, and will keep very quiet, you can stay here and read.'

'I didn't come home to sit down here and read. Why did they send for me to come if they won't let me see her? I want her. . . .'

'Hush. . . .' said Aunt Laura, with an air of being scandalised. She left him, closing the door with exaggerated quietness behind her, leaving him alone in the room that had once witnessed

so much happiness. He didn't know what to do. Read? The idea was ridiculous. He looked at the familiar shelves, on which he knew the place and title of every book. A sense of the room's awful emptiness oppressed him, for everything in it recalled the memory of his darling's presence; the books that they had read together; the big chair in which he had sat cuddled in her arms; her workbasket on the table by the window; and —terribly pathetic—a shopping list scribbled on the back of an envelope. He couldn't bear to be alone in the room with so many inanimate reminders; and while he was debating where he should go, a sudden angry jealousy flamed up in his heart towards the other people in the house: his father, Aunt Laura, the doctor, and the unknown nurse who shared the privilege that was denied him and didn't realise its value. He clenched his hands and cried aloud: 'We belong to one another. . . . She's mine. . . . She's mine. I hate them.'

He opened the door softly and stepped into the hall. Scarcely knowing what he was doing he looked into the drawing-room. There stood the piano with a sonata of Beethoven upon the music-stand. The room was full of a curious penetrating odour which came, he discovered, from a big vase full of pinks that had faded and gone yellow. Some days ago, he supposed, his mother had picked them. Her hands . . . he worshipped her hands. A strange and uncontrollable impulse made him bend and kiss the dead flowers.

But the atmosphere of that room was if anything more cruel than the other. He couldn't stay there. Once more he found himself

in the darkness and quiet of the hall. The house had never been so silent. Only, in the corner an oak grandfather's clock with a brass face engraved with the name of Carver, Hay, ticked steadily. In the silence he heard his own heart beating far faster than the clock.

Scarcely knowing what he was doing he climbed upstairs and crept quietly to the door of the room where his mother was lying. He knelt on the mat outside the door and listened. Inside the room there was no sound; not even a sound of breathing. If only he dared open the door. . . . If only he could see her for a second she might smile at him and he would be satisfied. He was thankful to find that the mere fact of being nearer to her made him feel more happy. For a long time he knelt there, and then, hearing a slight noise in his own room, where his father was supposed to be resting, he stole downstairs again, a little comforted, opened the front door and went out into the garden.

II

Mrs Barrow, at whose house it had been arranged that Edwin should put up for the night, was the Inglebys' nearest neighbour and their landlady. The gardens of the two houses stood back to back with a high wall between, and the relations of the neighbours had always been so friendly that the little door in the wall was never locked, even though it was so seldom used that tendrils of ivy had attached themselves to the woodwork, forming a kind of natural hinge.

On the Inglebys' side of the wall lay a modern

well-kept garden, not more than twenty years old. Edwin's mother had a passion for flowers, and his father had made the gratification of her pleasure his favourite hobby, so that Edwin's earliest memories of both of them were associated with the gathering of fruits and blooms, with the rich odours of summer, or, above all, the smell of newly-turned earth. This summer Mr Ingleby had planted the long bed that stretched along the side of the house towards the door in Mrs Barrow's wall with masses of delicately-coloured stocks. Though the form of these flowers was not particularly beautiful their scent rose to meet him in a hot wave of overpowering sweetness. He remembered a letter in which his mother had told him how wonderful they were. Everything reminded him of her. . . .

He passed through the door in the wall and entered another world.

Everything connected with Mrs Barrow was in character. She was a little old woman, the widow of a small manufacturer who had set his mark upon the countryside by the erection of a chimney stack taller than any other in the district, so tall that even from the summit of Pen Beacon it made a landmark more prominent than the slender spire of Halesby church. In Edwin's eyes its presence was so familiar that he had almost become fond of it. Many and many times on windy days he had watched the immense structure swaying gently as a reed in a summer breeze. Under the shadow of Mr Barrow's monument lay an old garden designed on the formal lines of a hundred years ago, full of honeysuckle arbours and narrow twisted paths : so rich, and so tangled that every year a great part of its fruitfulness

ran to waste. Long rows of lavender were there; and alleys of hoary apple-trees whose gnarled branches overreached the paths: and the whole place was so crowded with decaying vegetable matter and the mould of fallen leaves that even in high summer it had an autumnal savour and a ripe smell that was not unlike that of an apple loft.

Through this shady precinct he passed carrying his hand-bag, pausing only in a sudden patch of light where a bank of tawny scabious diffused an aromatic perfume in the sun. He paused, not because he was impressed by their garish beauty, but because many of the heads were now frequented by a new hatch of Comma butterflies eagerly expanding their serrated wings, drugged already with the flowers' harsh honey. Edwin had never seen this uncommon butterfly before. In the neighbourhood of St Luke's the species, which is notoriously capricious, had never appeared. He wished that he had a butterfly net with him: for by catching one of them he would have scored over Widdup.

So he passed to Mrs Barrow's house, a dark Georgian structure as twisted and autumnal as her garden, and there, in a gloomy sitting-room, he found the old lady herself, a little demure creature with round-hunched, shawl-covered shoulders, like the dormouse in *Alice in Wonderland*, taking tea with her companion, a decorous lady of the same age named Miss Beecock.

They did their best to make Edwin feel at home. They never mentioned his mother, but it was so obvious that their maidenly commonplaces were only designed to divert his mind from the tragic shadow which he carried with him, that Edwin

felt inclined to scandalise them by talking of it. . . . Their deliberate awkward kindness, the cautious glances which they exchanged, the little sniff of emotion which Mrs Barrow concealed in her empty teacup, when the pitiful contemplation of Edwin's youth and innocence overcame her, would have been amusing if there had been room for anything amusing on the darkened earth.

When they had finished the buttered scones and medlar jelly which Mrs Barrow made from fruit that fell on the dark leaf-mould of her garden, Mrs Barrow herself moved with short steps to a mahogany bureau, and calling Edwin to her side, showed him one of those secret drawers whose secret everybody knows, smelling of cedar-wood and aged russia leather. From this drawer she produced a purse made of beadwork, and from the purse her fragile fingers extracted a Georgian five-shilling piece, which, with a sigh, she then presented to Edwin. 'If I were you,' she said, 'I don't think I should spend it. Old coins like that are valuable. Mr Barrow had a great interest in anything old and historical.'

Edwin was so surprised by this generosity that he almost forgot to thank her; but Miss Beecock, in a shrill, soft voice, reminded him of his duty, saying: 'Now, isn't that kind of Mrs Barrow, Edwin?' Edwin hastily agreed that it was, and the old ladies smiled at one another, as though they were saying, 'Isn't that clever of us, to give him a toy that will take his mind off his mother?' In the silence that followed, a canary which had been pecking at a lump of sugar stuck in the bars of his cage, attracted by the bright hues of the ribbon on Mrs Barrow's cap, broke into a shrill twitter.

'Sweet . . . swee . . . t,' said Mrs Barrow with pursed lips.

'Sweet . . . sweet,' echoed Miss Beecock, with a little laugh.

'I think I will take my crochet on to the lawn,' said Mrs Barrow.

'If you have your shawl, and the grass is not too damp,' Miss Beecock reminded her.

'There was a heavy dew last week,' said Mrs Barrow. 'Which day was it? I think it must have been Tuesday. Yes . . . it was Tuesday. That was the day on which I spoke to Mr Waldron about thinning the grapes. And now, Edwin, would you like to fetch a book from the drawing-room? You may prefer to bring it out on to the lawn. You know the way. The key is on the outside of the door.'

Edwin said 'Yes.' He left them and climbed the creaking oak stairs, to the first story landing, a wide passage of polished wood lit by a shining fanlight that overlooked the street. He knew the room well enough. It had been one of the delights of his childhood. It was long, and irregular in shape, and crammed with curious things that he had once found entertaining.

He unlocked the door and released immediately a concentrated odour of the same character as that which had issued from the secret drawer in Mrs Barrow's bureau. Damp and cedar wood and mouldy russia leather. All the chairs in the room were covered with white draw-sheets as though they were dead and awaiting burial. The venetian blinds were down, and when Edwin raised them, the heavy rep curtains at the side of the three tall windows admitted no more than an ecclesiastical twilight.

There, however, stood the things which had delighted his youth. Nothing had been moved a hair's-breadth for many years: since the day, indeed, long before Edwin was born, when Mr Barrow had died. It was the best room of the house: and so reverenced by Mrs Barrow that she would never have dreamed of living in it or using it at all except on Christmas Day, when a melancholy family party of relatives and possible heirs assembled to do their duty by the old lady. Then, and only then, a fire was lighted, extracting from the walls a curious odour of dry rot, which resembled, curiously enough, the apple-loft odour which pervaded the garden.

Edwin was soon at home. Here was a great glass-fronted mahogany bookcase the wonder of which he had never thoroughly explored. Here was the flat glass showcase, shaped like a card-table in which a number of Mr Barrow's curiosities reposed. Here was the great musical-box (glass-topped again) with its prickly brass cylinder and twanging teeth for notes, and a winding lever that made a sound as impressive as the winding of a grandfather's clock.

Edwin thought he would try a tune. He wound up the mechanism, pressed over the starting lever, and the prickly cylinder began slowly to revolve. It made a bad start; for no one knows how many years ago it had been stopped in the middle of a tune. Then, having finished the broken cadence, it burst gaily into the song called 'Mousetraps for Sale,' a pathetic ballad which may have sounded sprightly in the ears of young people fifty years ago, but in this strange room was invested with a pathetic and faded quality which made Edwin wish it would stop. There was no need for him

to pull back the lever, for the musical box, as though guessing his wishes, suddenly petered out with a sort of metallic growl. Edwin laughed in spite of himself, at this peculiar noise, and hearing the echo of his own laugh turned to find himself staring into the jealous eyes of a portrait of a Victorian gentleman whom he took to be the late Mr Barrow, for whose delectation, over his glass of punch, the instrument had been purchased. Edwin began to feel a little uneasy. The feeling annoyed him. 'I'm silly to be like this,' he said to himself. 'I suppose it's the uncertainty. . . . Oh, I wish I knew. . . .'

He took refuge in the bookcase, from which he extracted, to his great delight, the complete works of Shenstone in two volumes, bound in slippery calf and published by Dodsley in the year seventeen-seventy. . . . The books were in a beautiful state of preservation. Edwin doubted if they had ever been read. Mr Barrow, no doubt, had purchased them simply for their local interest. With a final glance at Mr Barrow's portrait, in a faint hope that he approved of his choice, Edwin let down the blinds, so that no light penetrated the room but a single gleam reflected from the glass pane of a wool-worked fire-guard that hung from a bracket at the side of the fireplace. With a shiver he relocked the door. . . .

When he reached the garden with his Shenstone, the light was failing.

'You were a long time, Edwin,' said Mrs Barrow.

'Yes, wasn't he?' echoed Miss Beecock. 'I'm afraid it is time Mrs Barrow was going in.'

Quietly, and with a leisure that seemed to presume an endless placidity of existence, the old ladies folded their work, sighed, and recrossed the

lawn towards the house. In a little time came supper: biscuits and milk on which a thick cream had been rising all day. Then Mrs Barrow kissed him good-night. He felt her face on his cheek: a little chilly, but lax and very soft. Miss Beecock lighted him to bed with a candle in a highly-polished brass candlestick. The sheets were cool and of old linen. The bedroom smelt of apples. With the air of 'Mousetraps for Sale' in his head, and a sleepy consciousness of ancient creaking timbers, Edwin fell asleep.

He slept long and dreamlessly, waking in the morning to find the sun shining brilliantly through Mrs Barrow's lace curtains. At first he could not remember where he was, so completely had sleep, bred of long fatigue, obliterated his consciousness. Before he opened his eyes he had half expected to hear the noise of Widdup turning out of bed with a flop, or the clangour of the six-thirty bell. And then, with a rush, the whole situation came back to him: this was Halesby, and the new day might be full of tragedy.

At his bedside Miss Beecock, who had stolen into the room an hour or so before in slippered feet and found him sleeping, had placed a glass of creamy milk and biscuits. It was awfully kind of her, Edwin thought, as he sipped the yellow cream at the top of the glass. Outside in the garden it was very quiet. He had overslept the morning chorus of birdsong; but he heard the noise of a thrush cracking snail-shells on the gravel path beneath his window. He had forgotten to wind up his watch overnight; and when he found it in his waistcoat pocket where he had left it he saw that it had stopped. 'I'd better get up, anyway,' he thought, and while he

stood at the door wondering if Mrs Barrow's house ran to a bathroom, he heard a clock in the hall give a loud whirr and then strike ten. 'Good Lord, I've overslept myself,' he thought. 'I'd better buck up.'

Abandoning the uncertainty of hunting for a bath he dressed and came downstairs to the sitting-room (that was what it was called) in which the meals had been served the day before. Mrs Barrow was sitting there in pleasant sunlight, wearing a less elaborate cap and a shetland shawl, and the canary, whose brass cage and saffron plumage now shone brilliantly in the morning sunlight, was singing like mad. When Edwin came into the room she smiled at him.

'We're so glad that you slept well,' she said. 'Miss Beecock went to have a look at you but you were sleeping so soundly that she didn't like to disturb you. You must have been tired out. Now you'll be ready for breakfast.'

At this point Miss Beecock entered the room, her attire modified in the same degree as that of Mrs Barrow.

'Ah . . . .' she said with a little laugh. 'Here you are. I must ask Annie for your breakfast.'

'He'd like a nice brown egg, lightly boiled, and some buttered toast,' said Mrs Barrow temptingly.

'Yes, of course he would,' said Miss Beecock.

'I think if you don't mind,' said Edwin, 'I'd like to go home. It's so late.'

'Oh, you needn't mind us,' chimed the two old ladies.

That wasn't exactly what Edwin had meant, but he allowed himself to be persuaded, and even enjoyed his breakfast, to the accompaniment of the twitterings of the canary and his two hostesses.

'You'll sleep here again to-night, won't you?' they said when he was ready to go. Edwin thanked them. 'Oh, we're only too pleased to be of any assistance to your mother,' they said, pursuing his departure with the kindest and most innocent of smiles.

This time he did not linger in the old garden: he was far too anxious to get home and learn how things were going. At the door in the wall his heart stood still. What was he going to find? It seemed to him that something terrible might be waiting for him on the other side of the wall. It was a silly apprehension, he thought, and when he stepped into it the new garden was as sunny as the old. Only, on the long walk beside the bed of stocks, a mattress, blankets, and sheets were spread out to air in the sun. The scent of some disinfectant mingled with that of the flowers. His fears supplied an awful explanation. It was the bedding from his mother's room that was spread out there in the sun. And when he looked up to the windows of the house above him, he saw that the blinds were down. That, of course, needn't mean anything on the sunny side of the house. In a great hurry he turned the corner to the front and saw that the blinds on that side were down as well.

III

In the darkened dining-room Aunt Laura sat at his mother's desk writing letters with dashing fluency. When he came in she stopped her writing and rose to meet him. 'Edwin, my poor dear,' she said, holding out her hands to him. He took no notice of her hands.

'She's gone,' he said, 'in the night?'

'Yes. . . . In the night. She passed away quite quietly. It's a dreadful blow for us, Edwin, we must be brave. . . .'

He hadn't time for sentiments of that kind. 'She was alive when I came yesterday. And you wouldn't let me see her. *You*, of all people. . . . She hated you. She told me so. She always hated you . . . and she'd hate you for this more than anything.'

'Edwin,' she cried, 'don't say these terrible things.'

'They're true . . . true. I wish it were you who were dead. It was you who stopped me from seeing her . . . my little darling. . . . Damn you. . . . damn you.'

'Edwin. . . . you don't know what you're saying. You're cruel.'

'Cruel. . . . I like that. Cruel. *You* talk about cruelty. . . .'

'Edwin. . . .' Aunt Laura clutched nervously at her breast. It was funny to see this big blowzy woman crumple up like that. She flopped down in a red plush chair and started crying softly in a thin voice. Edwin didn't mind. Let her cry. She deserved it. Nothing of that kind could soften his indignant heart.

'Where's father?' he asked at last.

'I don't know. He's upstairs somewhere,' she said between her sobs. 'For goodness' sake, Edwin, don't go and say things like this to the poor man. We all have this trouble to bear. And we've had the strain of nursing her. Now, don't be hasty,' she pleaded.

'All right,' said Edwin, and left her.

Upstairs on the landing he found a pale, shadowy figure in which he could scarcely recognise his

father. Neither of them could speak at all. Edwin had been ready with the reproaches that had come to his lips in the presence of Aunt Laura; but he couldn't do it. This man was too broken. He was face to face with a grief as great as his own. There were no words for either of them. The boy and the man clung together in each other's arms, overcome with pity and with sorrow. On the landing, outside the door of the room where she lay dead, they stood together and cried quietly to each other. And now it seemed to Edwin as if pity for his father were overriding even the intensity of his own grief; for she had been everything to him, too, and for so many years. He felt that he would have done anything in the world to comfort this desolate man, whom he had always taken for granted and never really loved. But his mother had loved him. He wondered if they could do anything to assuage the bitterness of their loss by loving one another. They were two people left alone with nothing else in the world but each other. Why not . . .? That, he thought, was what his mother would have wished.

He felt his father's tears on his forehead, the roughness of his father's grey beard. He felt the man's body quivering with sobs, and the arms which clutched his body as if that were the only loved thing left to him in life. They went together into the little room that had always been Edwin's, and there they knelt together beside the bed. He didn't exactly know why they knelt, but kneeling there at his side, with his arm still clasped about his waist, he supposed that his father was praying; and though Edwin could not understand what good prayer could do, it seemed to him a simple and a beautiful

thing. It made him feel that he loved his father more than ever. He wished that he could pray himself. He tried to pray . . . for what? There was nothing left in this world for him to pray for. At last his father rose to his feet in the dim room, and Edwin rose with him. He spoke, and the tears still choked his voice and his bearded lip trembled. 'Edwin,' he said, 'I shall never be able to get over this. I'm broken . . . My life . . . my life has . . .' He stopped.

'You don't know what she was to me, Eddie. I can't realise, Eddie, there are only two of us left. We must help each other to bear it. We must be brave.'

Strange that a phrase which had sounded like cant on the lips of Aunt Laura should now seem the truest and most natural thing imaginable.

'We . . . we were like children together,' said his father.

Again they stood for a little while in silence. At last Edwin, still gripping his father's arm, said,—

'Father, may I see her?

'Of course, dear. . . .'

They went together to the room, and his father opened the door and pulled up one of the blinds. Mrs Bagley, the charwoman who did odd work in the house and was an expert in this melancholy office, had drawn a clean white sheet over the bed. His mother lay there in a cotton nightdress with her hands folded in front of her, and her lips gently smiling. Even her cheeks were faintly flushed, but the rest of her face and her hands were of a waxen pallor. She looked very small and child-like. She looked like a small wax doll. In this frail and strangely beautiful creature Edwin could

only recognise a shadow of the mother that he knew. It was a little girl that lay there, not his mother.

Edwin spoke in a whisper,—

'Should I kiss her?'

His father nodded and turned away.

But he did not kiss her as he had thought he would. For some reason he dared not, for he could not feel certain that it was she at all. He only touched her hands, the hands that he had always worshipped, with his fingers. They were cold; and still her lips smiled. The room was full of the odour of Sanitas which some one had sprayed or sprinkled over the floor. For the rest of his life the smell was one which Edwin hated; for in his mind it became the smell of death.

IV

On the evening after the funeral Edwin sat alone in the drawing-room. He sat there because the other room was still cumbered with the remnants of a melancholy repast: several leaves of mahogany had been dragged down from the dust of the attic and had lengthened the dining-room table to such an extent that there was scarcely room to move in it, and round this table, in the sunny afternoon, had clustered a large collection of people who smelt of black crape and spoke in lowered, gentle voices, out of respect for the woman whom, it seemed to Edwin, they had never known.

Everybody who entered the house—and there were many, for Mr Ingleby was much respected in Halesby—wore the same grave air. Even the

undertaker, a brisk little man with a fiery red beard and one shoulder lower than the other from the constant carrying of coffins, treated his daily task with the same sort of mute reverence. His face, at any rate, wore an expression that matched that of the mourners; and Edwin was only disillusioned as to the sincerity of his expression when he heard him swearing violently at the driver of the first mourning carriage. This moment of relaxation caused him to forget himself so far as to whistle a pantomime song as he crossed the drive.

The black-coated people in the dining-room did not hear him: they were far too busy being serious: and behind them, from time to time, Edwin could see the grey face of his father, with curiously tired and puzzled eyes. Puzzled . . . that was the only word for them. It was just as if the man were protesting, in all simplicity, against the unreason and injustice of the blow which had fallen on him. Edwin, savagely hating the presence of all these hushed, uninterested people, found in his father's suffering face a sudden reinforcement to his anger. It was a shame, a damned, ghastly shame, that a simple man like that should be hit in the dark; and even more pathetic that he should be simple enough to take the sympathy of his neighbours at its face value. Edwin glowed with a new and protective love for his father. It was as well that some generous emotion should be born to take the place of his numb grief.

Above all, the sight of his Aunt Laura, who was conscientiously doing the honours of the house, maddened him. He could not look at her without remembering that she had been selfish and unkind to his mother; that, on the very last

day, she had robbed him of the privilege of seeing his darling alive. Even now, he believed that she was enjoying herself. Her eyes occasionally brimmed with tears, but that meant nothing. They were such easy tears . . . so different from the terrible tears that had shaken his father's body on the day of desolation. If only *she* were dead, he thought, there would be no great loss.

And yet, while he thought of this, he suddenly caught sight of her husband, the little manufacturer whom he had lately begun to know as Uncle Albert, a small man with a shiny bald head and a diffident manner: and in the eyes of Uncle Albert, which were fixed upon his wife, he saw an extraordinary mixture of love and admiration for this shallow, diffuse creature whom he had found himself hating.

'If Aunt Laura were to die,' he thought, 'Uncle Albert might very well be like father is to-day. That's a queer idea. . . .' He was amazed at the complications of human relationships and the potential pain that love brings with it. He thought, 'It's no good thinking about it. . . . I give it up. I don't really wish she were dead. I only wish . . . that there were no such thing as death. Why does God allow it?' No answer came to him: but in place of an answer another angry impulse. 'Curse God,' he thought, meaning the God of Mr Leeming, the God to whom this queer collection of people were to dedicate his mother's soul. Another thought followed quickly: 'What's the good of cursing him? He doesn't exist. If he existed this sort of thing couldn't happen. . . .'

People were seriously setting themselves to the putting on of black kid gloves that the undertaker had provided. The horses on the gravel

drive were getting uneasy and the cab wheels made a grating noise. Heavy steps were heard descending the stairs—awkward steps like those of men moving furniture. Edwin saw that his father had heard too. He was looking towards the closed door of the room. He wanted to go and take his father's hand and hold it, but the space round the edge of the table was packed with people. Now they had opened the hall door. He dared not look out of the window.

The voice of Aunt Laura, most studiously kind, said to him: 'Eddie, you'll come along with your father and Uncle Albert and me.' He said 'All right.' People at the side of the table made way for him. On his way he found himself abreast of his friend, Miss Beecock. She said nothing, but smiled at him and put her arm on his sleeve. She was wearing black silk mittens, and her eyes were full of tears. That weak, tearful smile nearly did for Edwin.

The first cab was drawn up at the hall door. Edwin scrambled in last. Aunt Laura, with a rustle of black silk, made way for him. She took out her handkerchief, and Edwin was stifled with a wave of scent. He hated scent: but anyway it was better than Sanitas. He saw his father's puzzled eyes on the other side of the cab . . . so old, so awfully old. Uncle Albert took out his handkerchief too. Evidently, Edwin thought, it was the correct thing to do. He had misjudged him. Uncle Albert proceeded to blow his nose.

They were driving through the High Street. Aunt Laura noticed that most of the shop shutters were up, and in several cases tradesmen were standing at their shop doors bare-headed as they passed.

'It's very kind of them . . . very nice to see

so much respect, John,' she said to his father. Mr Ingleby said 'Yes,' and Aunt Laura, with a little laugh that was merely a symptom of nervousness, went on: 'I expect there'll be a crowd at the cemetery gate.' This time Mr Ingleby said nothing and Uncle Albert once more stolidly blew his nose. 'Albert, dear, I wish you wouldn't,' said Aunt Laura. The brakes grated, and the cab stopped with a jerk. 'Come along, Edwin, jump out, there's a good boy,' said Aunt Laura. 'You'll walk with your father.'

He walked with his father. The church was full. His father went with bowed head, seeing nothing; but Edwin was conscious of many faces that he knew. In the middle of the aisle the thought suddenly came to him that these people weren't really there to do honour to his mother: they were so many that most of them could never have known her: no, they were just curious people who had flocked there to find something sensational in the faces of the mourners. In a dull place like Halesby a funeral, and such an important funeral, was an unusual diversion. And this revelation made him determined that whatever happened he would show no emotion that might tickle the sensations of these ghouls. He only wished to goodness that he could explain the matter to his father so that he too might give them nothing to gloat over.

In the church, where a faint mustiness mingled with the exotic scent of arum lilies that diffused from the heap of wreaths on the coffin, Edwin held himself upright. They sang a hymn: 'I heard the voice of Jesus say . . . Come unto me and rest'—the first quatrain in unison, and Edwin sang with them, just as he would have sung in

the chapel at St Luke's. In the churchyard, when they walked in procession behind the bearers to the grave-side, his eyes were still dry, his lips did not tremble, though Aunt Laura's scented handkerchief was now drenched with tears, and even Uncle Albert, a virtual outsider, was on the edge of violent emotion.

The burial service was nothing to Edwin. There was no consolation in it nor, to him, the least atom of religious feeling. A mockery, a mockery, a solemn and pretentious mockery. For she was dead . . . she had vanished altogether, and the thing that they were burying with muttered formulas and tears was no more she than the empty parchment of the cocoon is the glowing butterfly. Let them cry their eyes out. That was not grief. Beyond tears. Beyond tears. . . .

With a curious air of relief that was very near to a furtive gaiety, the party drove back and reassembled in the dining-room. All except Mr Ingleby. 'He has gone to his room, poor dear,' said Aunt Laura, with her nervous laugh. 'Mrs Barrow, do have a slice of ginger-cake. Just a little?' Round the long table conversation began to flow, cautiously at first, but with an increasing confidence, when it became clear that it was unattended by any revengeful consequences.

'Didn't you think it was awfully nice to see the people in High Street so respectful, Mrs Willis?' said Aunt Laura. Edwin looked up. This then was the Mrs Willis of Mawne Hall with whom his mother had planned the visit to Switzerland. He saw a middle-aged woman in black satin, with a gold watch-chain round her neck and jet in her bonnet. She caught his interested eyes and in return smiled. Aunt Laura went unanswered.

'I wonder,' Edwin thought, 'if she understands what a fraud the whole thing is.' At any rate she looked kind . . . and she had been kind to his mother too. A moment later she said good-bye, and when Aunt Laura had escorted her to the door, for Mrs Willis was a person of consequence, the rest of the company began to disappear. At last Edwin was left alone in the room with his aunt and uncle. Aunt Laura's face, that had been glowing with hospitable smiles, now took a more serious cast.

'Edwin,' she said, 'I want to speak to you.'

'Do you?' said Edwin. 'Well . . . go on.'

'It's very painful . . . I'm afraid . . . I'm half afraid that it will have upset your father, poor man—as if he hadn't enough to put up with.'

'What on earth do you mean?'

'How can you ask? I mean your behaviour to-day. In the church. In the cemetery. You stood there just as if . . . just as if . . . oh, it was most irreverent. Not a sign of grief! You must have noticed it, Albert?'

Uncle Albert, most uncomfortable at his inclusion in this family scene, but fully aware of the disaster which would follow denial, said, 'Yes . . . yes . . . yes, certainly.'

'Every one must have noticed it,' Aunt Laura went on. 'It was a public scandal. It was unnatural. It showed such a curious lack of feeling.'

'Feeling,' said Edwin. 'What do you know about feeling?'

'Steady, Edwin, steady,' from Uncle Albert.

'If mother were here,' he said, 'and could hear you talking this damned piffle she'd laugh at you. That's what she'd do.'

'Edwin!'

'It's true. . . . She couldn't stick your sort of grief at any price.'

'On the very day of her burial. . . .'

'She's not buried. It wasn't she you buried. Oh, I'm sick of you. . . .'

'Edwin . . .' said Uncle Albert, who felt that something in the way of protection was demanded of him. 'Really now . . .'

'Oh, I don't mean you, uncle,' said Edwin.

'You cruel boy,' Aunt Laura sobbed.

He left them there. He carried his bitterness into the drawing-room on the other side of the passage. . . . It was very quiet there. Through the bow window floated the perfume of the bed of stocks. In the corner stood the piano. He had often listened to his mother playing at night when he was in bed. He loved her to play him to sleep. The piano was shut; and the shut piano seemed to him symbolical. All the music and all the beauty that had been there had gone out of the house. The house was an empty shell. Like a dry chrysalis. Like a coffin. There, on the hearthrug, where he had crawled as a child, he lay down and cried.

CHAPTER X

THRENODY

I

From this emotional maelstrom the current of Edwin's life flowed into a strange peace. It seemed that the catastrophe of Mrs Ingleby's death had taken the Halesby household by surprise and stunned it so thoroughly that it would never recover its normal consciousness. Edwin's father, who had now returned to the ordinary round of business, was still dazed and puzzled, and very gray. Their servant, a young woman with an exaggerated sense of the proprieties, or perhaps a dread of living alone in such a gloomy house, had given notice. Only Aunt Laura, to Edwin's shame, showed the least capacity for dealing with the situation.

However few of the graces may have fallen to her lot, she was certainly not lacking in the domestic virtues. When the maid departed with her tin trunk and many tearful protestations of her devotion to the memory of the dear mistress, Aunt Laura turned up her sleeves and took possession of the kitchen, and Mr Ingleby, who had gloomily anticipated a domestic wilderness, found that in spite of the maid's defection, ambrosial food appeared before him like manna from heaven, the only difference being that Uncle Albert, who could not be permitted for one moment to remain a bachelor, took his meals with the family.

The relation between Edwin and Aunt Laura

was still difficult. She could not forget—and he could not withdraw—the bitter things that had been said on that most mournful day, though her native good humour, which was profuse and blustery like the rest of her, made it difficult for her to maintain an attitude of injured benignance. Even Edwin had to admit that she was a good cook; but the excellence of her food was qualified by her incessant chatter and her nervous laugh. Edwin simply couldn't stick them; but it amazed him to find that Uncle Albert evidently found them cheerful and reassuring. Indeed, it was possibly one of the reasons why he had fallen in love with her, being a man who resembled her in nothing and whose enthusiasms could never get him beyond a couple of words and a giggle.

Mr Ingleby too seemed to emerge without serious irritation from this diurnal bath of small-talk, retiring, as Edwin supposed, to certain gloomy depths of his own consciousness where the froth and bubble of Aunt Laura's conversation became imperceptible. Even when she spoke to him directly—though most of her observations were addressed to the world in general—he would not trouble to answer her: a slight which Aunt Laura took quite good-humouredly.

'Bless you,' she would have said, 'the man's so wrapped up in himself that he's miles away from anywhere. Of course you can understand it in a man of his age, especially when you realise how devoted he was to poor Beatrice'—Mrs Ingleby's name might never now escape the commiserating prefix—'but when a boy like Edwin tries it on it's another matter altogether. It's simply conceit. Personally, I think it was a great mistake of his poor mother's to send him to

St Luke's. The grammar school's good enough for the Willises. A great mistake. . . . The boy is getting ideas of himself that aren't warranted by his position. I don't know what we are to do with him. We certainly can't have him running wild here.' And Uncle Albert would say: 'Certainly, certainly, my love. . . .'

In spite of these pronounced opinions Aunt Laura was careful not to cross swords with Edwin himself. Indeed, she went a good deal out of her way to propitiate him with various material kindnesses, and particularly certain delicacies in the way of food, which, to the ruin of her figure in later life, represented to her the height of earthly enjoyment. Edwin didn't quite know how to take these attentions. He couldn't help disliking her, and the fact that she was really kind to him rather took the wind out of his sails. He would have been much happier if they had been allowed to remain in a state of armed neutrality.

A fortnight passed . . . happily for Edwin in spite of all that he felt he ought to feel. He missed his mother awfully. That was true enough. And yet . . . and yet it was also true to say that he was only beginning to live: to appreciate the joy of his growing strength: to realise the enchanted domains that were open to his eager feet and to his eager mind. Here he had freedom, leisure, health: so much of the world to see: so much of human knowledge to explore. And though the thought of death, and the particular disaster that had befallen him fell upon his spirit sometimes with a shadow that plunged the whole world into desperate darkness, he could not deny that the shadow was gradually lifting, and the character of the agony that had desolated him was becoming

less spontaneous, till, in the end, it became almost a calculable emotion that might be indulged or banished at will. He found it difficult to understand this. He thought: 'I'm a brute, a callous, insensitive brute. What would she think of me . . .? And yet I can't help it. I'm made like that. . . .' And then, after long and bitter deliberation: 'I believe she would understand. I expect she was made like that too. I'm sure she was. And if there's one thing in the world that she'd hate it would be that I should force myself to pretend anything.'

The high summer weather held. Never was there such a June. Edwin, in the joy of perfect health, would get up very early in the morning when the dew lay on the roses, and run in a sweater and flannel trousers down the lane and over the field to the mill-pond where he and his mother had walked so often in the evenings of spring. Here, where the water was deepest and great striped perch stole slowly under the camp-shedding, he would strip and bathe, lying on his back in the water so that low sunbeams came dancing over the surface into his eyes that were on the level of the flat water-lily leaves and their yellow balls now breaking into cups.

Afterwards when he would sit glowing on the bank, the sun would be rising and growing warmer every minute, and this new warmth would seem to accentuate the odour of the place that was compact of the yellow water-lily's harsh savour, the odour of soaked wood, and another, more subtly blended: the composite smell of water that is neither fast nor stagnant, the most provocative and the coolest smell on earth.

On the way home he would sometimes get a whiff

of the miller's cowhouse, when the door was thrown open, and from within there came a sound of quiet breathing or of milk hissing in a pail. And sometimes, from the garden, the scent of a weed bonfire would drift across his path. All things smelt more poignantly at this early hour of the morning. All things smell more wonderfully early in life. . . .

With these wonders the day began; but stranger things lay in store for him. He revisited all his old haunts: the tangled woods and gardens of Shenstone on the hill-side: the ruins of the Cistercian abbey on whose fall the poet had moralised, the little chapel that marked the grave of the murdered Mercian prince. His bicycle took him farther. Westward . . . always westward.

In those days it always seemed to him as if the mountainous country that his mother had shown him that evening on Uffdown, rolling away into remote and cloudy splendours, must be the land of his heart's desire: and though he could never reach it in a day, he managed several times to cross the Severn and even to scale the foothills upon the farther bank from which he could see the Clee Hills rising in a magnificent bareness, shaking the woods and pastures from their knees. And these distant hills would tempt him to think of the future and other desires of his heart: in the near distance Oxford, where Layton and other demigods in gray flannel trousers abode, and beyond the fine untravelled world, rivers and seas and forests, desolate wonderful names. China . . . Africa . . . 'Some day,' he said to himself, 'I will go to Africa . . .'

In this way he began to think of his present adventures as a kind of prelude to others remoter and more vast. One day he had ridden farther

away than usual, and having taken his lunch at the bridge town of Bewdley, he pushed his bicycle up the immense hill that overshadows the town along the road to Tenbury. For all its steepness this mountain road was strangely exhilarating, the air that moved above it grew so clean and clear. Below him, between the road and the river, lay the mighty remnants of the Forest of Wyre.

His way tumbled again to a green valley, where no mountains were to be seen; and while Edwin was deciding to turn off down the first descending lane and explore the forest, he heard a sound of spades and pickaxes and came upon a group of navvies, several of them stripped to the waist in the sun, working at a cutting of red earth that was already deep on either side of the road. For the most part they worked in silence; but one of them, a little one-eyed man, with a stiff soldierly back, encouraged them with a string of jokes. They called him 'Gunner,' and the elaboration with which his chest had been tattooed with nautical symbols led Edwin to suppose that he was a sailor. When he saw Edwin leaning on his bicycle and watching the work, he called out to him, asking if he wanted a job. Edwin shook his head. 'I reckon,' said the Gunner, 'that a foreman's job would be more in your line, Gaffer. It's a fine sight to see other people working. The harder the better.'

The men laughed and stretched their backs, leaning on their spades, and Edwin could see how a fine dew of sweat had broken out under the hair on their chests. It seemed to him a noble sight. 'What are you working at?' he asked. 'Is it a railway?'

'To hell with your railway,' said the Gunner. 'Who would make a railway heading for the river

Severn? No . . . It's a pipe-track. This here's the Welsh water scheme.'

'Where is it going to?'

'North Bromwich.'

'And where does it come from?'

'From Wales. . . . From the Dulas Valley, where they're rebuilding the reservoir under a hill they call Savaddan. And a black job it is, I can tell you.'

'Is it anywhere near a place called Felindre? I think it must be.'

'Right, my son. The pipe-line goes through Felindre. Sixty or eighty mile from here.'

'My people come from Felindre . . .'

'Well, God pity them. . . . That's all I can say. I've been in that place on a Christmas Day, and not a pint of beer stirring. . . . Ah, that's a black job. Well, mates, come on. . . .'

Again the men who had been listening, lifted their picks and spades, and the busy clinking sounds of digging began again. Edwin wished the Gunner good-afternoon, and began to push his bicycle up the hill again. Sixty or eighty miles. . . . That wasn't so very far. Six or eight hours ride. . . . Perhaps some day he could go there. He half persuaded himself with a sentimental argument that it was only natural that he should be happy in the country from which his mother's people had come; that even the borderland of it must be possessed by the same curiously friendly atmosphere. 'I am always most happy west of Severn,' he thought. And then he began to wonder about the sailor whom the men called Gunner. Perhaps that man had actually been in Africa. . . .

He managed to get a sixpenny tea at a little general shop on the very crown of the hills, where

a small hamlet named Far Forest stood. The romantic name of the place appealed to him; and it was a curious adventure to sit down alone to tea in a back room that smelt of candles and paraffin and bacon. At the shop door a serious old man with a white beard had received him; but the tea was brought to him by a little girl in an extremely clean pinafore whom the old man addressed as Eva.

She was a curious mixture of shyness and friendliness, and her serious eyes examined Edwin minutely from under straight dark eyebrows. When she came in with the tea she found Edwin examining some books that stood in a cupboard with a glass door. Evidently she was very proud of them.

'They are my brother James's prizes,' she said, and went on to explain how clever he was and what a scholar, until the old man called 'Eva,' and she returned to him in the shop. It was all amazingly peaceful, with the westering sun flooding the doorway where the old man had been sitting out in a chair when Edwin arrived: and opposite the door was a little patch of green strewn with mossy boulders, a kind of platform in front of which the huge panorama of Clee and all the Radnor hills expanded.

'In a place like this,' Edwin thought, 'people never change.' It was a ripping, placid sort of existence, in which nothing ever happened, but all things were just simple and serious and tender like the eyes of the little girl named Eva who had brought him his tea. 'Good-evening, sir,' said the old man at the door. It was rather nice to be called 'Sir.' Coasting down the hill into Bewdley, Edwin had all the joy of the state that

he called 'the after-tea feeling.' It was exhilarating and splendid : and at the end of it came the misty river town with its stone bridge and the great river of the Marches swirling proudly to the south. When he neared home, divinely tired and hungry, the black-country stretched before him in a galaxy of starry lights. As he crossed the brow of the hill above Halesby, the Willis' Mawne furnaces suddenly lit the sky with a great flower of fire.

II

At home, Auntie Laura was in possession. Evidently she was primed with serious business; for Edwin could see that his father sat spiritually, if not physically, pinioned in the plush arm-chair. Aunt Laura wore an air of overpowering satisfaction. Evidently she had already triumphed, and she smiled so cheerfully at Edwin that he felt convinced that she had scored him off in some way. On the side of the fire opposite to his father Uncle Albert sat smoking, not as if he enjoyed it, but because it gave him the excuse of an occupation into which he might relapse in moments of tension.

'Well, here he is at last,' said Aunt Laura. 'We've been talking about you, Edwin.'

Edwin had guessed as much.

'Well, what is it?' he said, and his tone implied that he was certain that some dark scheme had been launched against his peace of mind. Uncle Albert puffed uncomfortably at his pipe and nicotine or saliva made a gurgling noise in it. Mr Ingleby sighed. Aunt Laura, tumbling to the hostility of the new atmosphere, hastened to propitiate.

'I expect you're hungry, Edwin,' she said. . . .

'No. . . . I'm not hungry, thanks. What is it?'

'You needn't be cross, Edwin. . . . We've decided. . . .' So it was all arranged. . . . 'We've decided that your father must go away for a rest . . . a little holiday. . . .'

'Yes. . . . And that means, of course, that we shall have to shut up the house until he returns, and of course that will be quite easy, because it's time you were getting back to St Luke's. We thought you had better go on Monday.'

'Monday?' It was now Saturday.

'Yes. . . . Monday. It is fortunate that your uncle has to go into North Bromwich on business that day. . . .'

'Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Business,' put in Uncle Albert, as though he were anxious to explain that his visit to that sink of iniquity was in no way connected with pleasure.

Edwin burned with sudden and quite unreasonable indignation.

'And you agreed to this, father?'

'Yes. . . . Of course I agreed. Your aunt is quite right. I am overtired. It was a terrible strain. And the doctor suggested that my native air. . . .'

'Oh . . . I don't mean that,' said Edwin. 'I mean about St Luke's . . . I can't go back now . . . of course I can't . . .'

'Don't be ridiculous and childish, Edwin,' said Aunt Laura severely. 'You don't imagine just because'—with a hushed and melancholy inflection —'this . . . has happened, you're never going to school again?'

'No. . . . I don't mean that. Of course I don't. Only . . . only the term is nearly over. In another

fortnight all the chaps will be going away for the hols. It isn't worth it. I should feel . . .'

'We weren't considering your feelings so much as your good,' said Aunt Laura complacently.

'Father . . . father . . . you can't mean it. You see. . . . I don't know. . . . it would all be so strange. So awfully difficult. I should have lost touch with all the work the form was doing. I shouldn't be able to pick it up. It's rotten . . . rotten . . .'

'Edwin, you will distress your father . . .'

'Oh, Aunt Laura, do let father speak for himself.'

Immense volumes of yellow smoke signalled Uncle Albert's distress.

'Father . . .'

'It's difficult, Edwin . . .'

'But it isn't difficult, father, dear. Aunt Laura doesn't realise. She doesn't realise what it would be like going back like that to St Luke's. It would only be waste of time. Father, I'd read during the hols. . . . I would, really. It isn't that I want to get out of going back to work. It isn't that a bit. I'd work like blazes. Only . . . only everything now seems to have gone funny and empty . . . sort of blank. I . . . I feel awful without mother . . .'

'Edwin . . .' warningly, from Aunt Laura.

That Aunt Laura should presume to correct him in a matter of delicacy! 'Of course you don't understand,' he said bitterly. 'You don't want me to speak about mother. You've had your excitement out of it. You've had your chance of bossing round, and now you want to arrange what I shall do for the rest of my life, I suppose. You've no . . . no reverence.'

He was really very angry. It was always

difficult for him to be anything else with Aunt Laura; for he felt that it was somehow horribly unjust for her to be alive when his mother was dead, and he could never, never forget what his darling had told him of her stupid jealousy. On this occasion Aunt Laura seemed to be less disturbed than usual by his violence. She spoke with a calculated coolness that compelled the admiration of her husband, sitting very uncomfortably on the edge of the storm, desperately anxious to show that without his taking sides his wife could rely on his support.

'It's funny, Edwin,' said Aunt Laura, stroking her black skirt, 'that *you* should use the word Reverence. . . . It reminds me of something that I wanted to speak to you about. You realise, don't you, that we are all supposed to be in mourning? And yet, day after day, I see you going down the town in a pair of white canvas gym. shoes. White . . . ! Now, you mustn't talk to me about reverence, Edwin.'

Edwin burst out laughing. It was no good arguing with the woman. He gave a despairing glance at his father. Was it possible that the man could listen seriously to superficial cant of this kind? Was it possible that he could tolerate the woman's presence in the house? He looked, and he saw nothing but tiredness and desolation in the man's face. He saw that in reality his father was too tired for anything but compromise. All life, all determination had been stamped out of him, and though Edwin clutched at the sympathy which he knew must be concealed in the man's mind, he began to realise that, after all, circumstances had left the whole household curiously dependent on Aunt Laura; that without her the whole domestic

machine would collapse, and that, therefore, the infliction must be suffered patiently. Edwin determined to leave the matter where it stood, but Aunt Laura, inflamed with approaching triumph, would not let it rest. 'I am sure that you agree with me, John,' she threw out challengingly.

'No doubt Edwin did not understand. You know more about the people in the town than we do, Laura.'

'Compromise . . .' thought Edwin, 'but I suppose it can't be helped.' At any rate nothing that he might do should give the man a moment's discomfort. He possessed himself in silence.

'But I think, perhaps,' Mr Ingleby went on, 'that Edwin is right. It would be hardly worth while going back to St Luke's for a fortnight.'

'Of course you know best, John,' Aunt Laura hurried to assure him, 'but it's really quite impossible for us to put him up while the house is closed and you are away. You know that we've arranged to have the painters in.'

On a matter of fact, and one outside controversy, Uncle Albert felt that he was safe in giving his support.

'I quite understand that,' said Mr Ingleby, 'but it's a simple matter. Edwin can come with me.'

'Oh, father, how wonderful!'

'Well, of course,' said Aunt Laura, 'if he won't be a nuisance to you. . . .' But Edwin was too pleased and excited to mind what she said. He kissed his father, and Mr Ingleby, with a curious tenderness, clasped his arm. It seemed that catastrophe had strange uses. Already it had thrown the ordinary course of life into more than one curious byway, and now, behold, he was to embark upon another strange adventure, to become familiar

with another sort of life. He determined that his duty (whatever that might be) should not suffer by it. When they returned from their holiday, all through the summer months, he would work like anything: he would make that Balliol scholarship that had seemed part of an indefinite future, as near a certainty as made no matter. He would show them—in other words Aunt Laura and Uncle Albert—what he could do.

'If we are going on Monday I had better think of packing,' he said. 'Shall I need to take many things, father?'

'Oh, don't worry your father, Edwin,' said Aunt Laura.

III

Sunday came with its usual toll of dreariness. The customary penance of the morning service was actually the least trying part of it to Edwin. To begin with, the parish church of Halesby was a structure of great beauty. Originally an offshoot of the abbey that now stood in ruins above the long string of slowly silting fishponds on the Stour, the grace and ingenuity of successive ages of priestly architects had embellished its original design with many beautiful features, and the slender beauty of its spire, crowning a steep bank above the degraded river, had imposed an atmosphere of dignity and rest upon the rather squalid surroundings of this last of the black-country towns. The music, even though it was not in any way comparable with that of St Luke's, was good, and the recent arrival of a young and distinguished rector from Cambridge, whose voice and person would have qualified him for success as a bishop,

or an actor manager, had restored to the building some of its popularity as a place of resort or of escape from the shuttered Sunday streets.

At ten o'clock the fine peal of bells filled the air with an inspiriting music. Edwin remembered, hearing them, the melancholy with which they had often inspired him on dank evenings of autumn when the ringers were at practice. Very different they sounded on this summer morning, for a gentle wind was moving from the hills to westward, and chime eddied in a soft air that was clearer than the usual, if only because it was Sunday and the smoke of a thousand furnaces and chimney stacks no longer filled it with suffocation.

At ten-fifteen precisely Aunt Laura appeared in the dining-room, in a black silk dress smelling faintly of lavender: a minute later, Uncle Albert, in a frock coat, coaxing the last sweetness from his after-breakfast pipe. Mr Ingleby also had exchanged the alpaca jacket in which he had been leisurely examining his roses, for the same uniform. Uncle Albert, Edwin noticed, had not yet removed the deep band of crape from his top-hat. As usual, Aunt Laura appeared a little flustered, the strain of conscious magnificence in her millinery making it difficult for her to collect her thoughts.

'Are you sure you have all the prayer-books, Albert?' she asked anxiously.

Uncle Albert regretfully knocked out his pipe. 'Yes, my dear,' he said.

'Don't scatter those ashes all over the fireplace, Albert. The least you can do is to keep the room tidy on Sunday.'

'Yes, my dear.'

'Edwin, have you got your prayer-book? Why, boy, you've actually put on a grey striped tie.

Run and change it quickly. I don't know what people will think.'

Edwin, smarting, obeyed. When he returned the atmosphere of impatience had increased. Aunt Laura was saying: 'John, dear, are you sure that the clock is right? I'm afraid the bells have stopped. No . . . thank goodness, there they are again. That's better, Edwin. Now we really must start. You have the money for the collection, Albert? Give it to me, or you'll be sure to leave me without any. I do hope we shan't be late. We should look so prominent. . . .'

Why should they look so prominent? The question puzzled Edwin all the way down through the quiet streets. But even though this mystery exercised his mind he could not help appreciating the curious atmosphere of the route through which they progressed. At the corner of the street the first familiar thing smote him: it was the odour of stale spirits and beer that issued from between the closed doors of the Bull's Head public-house, behind which it had been secreted ever since an uproarious closing time the night before. Then came the steep High Street, and from its gutters the indescribable smell of vegetable refuse left there overnight from the greengrocer's stalls. On an ordinary morning it would not have been noticed, for the motion of wheeled traffic in the highway and the sight of open shop windows would have distracted the attention. On Sunday morning, however, it became the most important thing in the road, and seemed to emphasise the deadness of the day in contrast to the activities and dissipations of Saturday night. It called attention to the indubitable sordidness of the whole street: the poverty of its grimy brick: the faded lettering

above the shop windows: the paint that cracked and peeled from the closed shutters. On this morning Halesby was a squalid and degraded town. Even Mr Ingleby's shop in the High Street looked curiously small and mean. Edwin disliked the sight of his own name printed over it. It reminded him of Griffin's social prejudices.

They entered a small door in the transept when the last bell was tolling; and as they stepped into the full church Edwin realised at last the reason of Aunt Laura's particular anxieties. They were on show. This was the first occasion, since the funeral, that the family had entered the church, and, in accordance with an immemorial custom, the congregation were now engaged in searching their faces and their clothing for evidences of the grief that was proper to their condition.

Kneeling in the conventional opening prayer, Edwin could see through his folded fingers that the whole of the gathering was engaged in a ghoulish scrutiny of their party. Now, for the first time, he realised the full meaning of the horror with which his grey tie had inspired Aunt Laura. He could even feel Aunt Laura, who remained kneeling longer than usual, wallowing in the emotion that her presence evoked. It was a rotten business. If he could have dared to do so without causing an immense scandal, Edwin would have got up and left the church. He saw Aunt Laura glance at his father with a kind of proprietary air, as if this exhibition were really her own responsibility and the degree of interest that Mr Ingleby's appearance aroused were to her credit.

Edwin also looked at his father. He wondered if Mr Ingleby were in the least conscious of the

spectacle to which he was contributing: decided that he wasn't. He was thankful for that. It became apparent to him that, if the truth were known, his father was a creature of the most astonishing simplicity: a simplicity that was almost pathetic. He could see, he knew that the whole church must see, that the man had suffered. The brutes. . . . He was awfully sorry for his father. And he loved him for it. The whole affair was shameful and degrading. Never mind . . . in another twenty-four hours they would be clear of all this sort of thing. It was something to be thankful for.

'*When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness and doeth that which is lawful and right. . . .*' The rector began to intone. He spoke the words as though his whole soul were behind them: his voice vibrated with a practised earnestness: and all the time Edwin could see his dark eyes scrutinising the congregation in detail, congratulating himself on the presence of his supporters, speculating on the absence of certain others. In the final cadence of the sentence, a masterly modulation that would have made you swear that his whole life was in his mission, his eyes swivelled into the corner where the Ingleby party were sitting, and Edwin could have bet his life that they lighted up with a kind of satisfaction at the addition of this undoubted attraction to his morning's entertainment. It even seemed to him that the rector's glances almost imperceptibly indicated to his wife, a little woman of a pathetic earnestness qualified for the ultimate bishopric by a complete subjection to her husband's personality, the fact that the Inglebys were on view.

The rector, who had views on the advantages of

scamping the drier portions of the church service and stressing any sentence that held possibilities of fruity sentiment, soon got into his stride. He was in excellent voice that morning, and on two occasions in the first lesson availed himself of an opportunity of exploiting the emotional break—it was very nearly a sob—that had done so much to establish his reputation in his early days at Halesby. He was making hay while the sun shone: for in the confirmation service such opportunities are more limited.

Edwin enjoyed the psalms. There was even something familiar and pleasant in the tunes of the Cathedral Psalter after the exotic harmonies of St Luke's. He sang the tenor part (when last he remembered singing them it had been alto) and lost his sense of his surroundings in the beauty of the words. In the middle of them, however, he became conscious of his father singing too. He had never sat next to his father in church before. His mother had always separated them: and for this reason he had never before heard his father sing. The result filled him with horror. Mr Ingleby had no idea of tune and was apparently unconscious of this disability. Edwin reflected how great an interest music had been in his mother's life: realised that from this part of her his father must always have been isolated by this natural barrier. It was strange. . . . He began to wonder what they really had in common. He remembered Griffin. No . . . not that. . . .

This speculation he did his best to stifle while the rector galloped over the desert wastes of the Litany: but the kneeling posture was rendered uncomfortable by the presence in front of him of an old maiden lady who smelt of carraway seeds,

a spice that Edwin detested. A hymn followed. Luckily, this time his father did not sing. Poor creature. . . . Edwin was now so ashamed of his criticism that he almost wished he would. And then they settled down to the sermon.

From the first Edwin had decided that he would not listen. The simple austerity of the service at St Luke's, where the liturgy was allowed to unfold its sonorous splendours for itself, had bred in him a distaste for the rector's histrionics. So he did not hear them, contenting himself with a detailed examination of such of the congregation as were within his range. He saw them classified in their social gradations from the pompous distinction of Sir Joseph Hingston, the ironmaster, who, in spite of his baronetcy, wore a frock coat that did not differ greatly from that of Mr Ingleby, to their late maid, dressed in black, and now conscious of the reflected glory that she had almost sacrificed by leaving. And the thing that impressed him most about this very various gathering was their shabbiness, and the fact that nearly all of those whom he knew seemed so much older than they had been when he last saw them.

Thinking of the light and elegance and cleanliness of St Luke's, it appeared to him that Halesby was indeed a muddy and obscure backwater and that his own people, sitting in the pew beside him, were, in reality as much fitted to inhabit it as all the rest of the shabby congregation. Even the Willises, his mother's new friends, whom a wave of commercial prosperity had carried forward into one of the front pews of the nave within calculable distance of the glory of Sir Joseph Hingston himself, would have looked very ordinary folk in the chapel at St Luke's.

He began to wonder if Griffin, and more latterly Aunt Laura, had been right: whether, after all, his mother had made an ambitious mistake in sending him to a public school when the ancient foundation of the Halesby Grammar School had stood waiting for the reception of him and his kind. There, in the fifth row on the left of the nave, sat Mr Kelly, the grammar school's head-master: a swarthy Irishman with a sinister, rather disappointed face. He wasn't at all Edwin's idea of a schoolmaster. Even old fat Leeming looked more distinguished than that. And yet, if he were good enough for the son of the opulent Walter Willis, he must surely be good enough for the son of an ordinary Halesby tradesman.

For the greater part of the sermon these problems of social precedence engaged Edwin's puzzled mind. It had come as something of a shock to him to find that his mother came of a farming stock, even though the farmers had lived in a Norman castle and had once been good enough to bear a lance in company with the Lords Marchers. Examining the face of his father, who appeared to be engrossed in the rector's rhetoric, Edwin decided that his features were really far too distinguished to belong naturally to a country chemist. Here, perhaps, in spite of present circumstance, lay the explanation of his own indubitable gentility. It was funny, he reflected, that he had never heard anything from his mother about the origins of the Inglebys: he had not even known from what part of the country their stock had sprung, and this ignorance made the expedition on which they were to start on the morrow more enthralling than ever. It was quite possible that the discovery of some illustrious ancestry might put him right with

himself and justify his claim to a birthright which at present seemed rather shadowy.

Even if this failed, he decided, there remained Oxford. A fellow of Balliol (his imagination travelled fast) would have a right to hold up his head with any one in that congregation—Sir Joseph Hingston not excepted—even though the name of the fellow's father happened to be printed on his toothbrush. It might even be for him to restore the prestige of the Ingleby name. 'But in that case,' he thought, 'it will be better for me to buy my toothbrushes somewhere else. . . .' Even the fact that Keats was a chemist did not modify this determination.

The sermon ended, and during the collection a hymn was sung. Half an hour before this, a gowned verger had stolen on tiptoe to the Inglebys' pew and whispered in Mr Ingleby's ear, depositing a wooden plate lined with velvet under the seat as furtively as if it were something of which he was ashamed. When the collection began Edwin's father left his pew and began to carry the plate round the transept in which they were seated.

Edwin, out of the corner of his eye, saw a glow of satisfaction spread over the features of Aunt Laura. Now, more than ever, the depth of the family's grief, was to be demonstrated in the eyes of all men. Edwin thought it was a rotten shame to make his father collect on this Sunday of all Sundays. The hymn was a short one, and for several minutes after it was finished the clink of silver and the duller sound of copper coins was heard in every corner of the echoing church. Then the sidesmen formed themselves into a double file and moved singly up the aisle. First came Sir Joseph Hingston, erect and podgy, with his smooth grey

waistcoat in front of him like the breast of a pouter pigeon. Mr Willis, of Mawne, with a humbler but not unambitious abdominal development followed him. Edwin conceived a fanciful theory that when Mr Willis, in the course of time, should have grown as wealthy as the baronet, there would be nothing to choose between their profiles. A miserly but erect old gentleman named Farr, who had once given Edwin a halfpenny, followed Mr Willis. Last but one came Edwin's father, with the red-bearded undertaker an eager last.

On the whole, Edwin was satisfied (as was obviously Aunt Laura) with Mr Ingleby's appearance. He certainly looked more like the father of a fellow of Balliol than Sir Joseph Hingston. The money descended with a series of opulent splashes into the brass salver that the rector held in front of the chancel steps : the organist (in private life he was a carpenter) meanwhile extemporising vaguely in the key of C. The rector carried the salver arm-high to the altar, as though he were exhibiting to the Almighty the personal fruits of his oratory. Mr Ingleby stole quietly to his seat bathed in the admiring glances of Aunt Laura. A short prayer . . . . '*And now to God the father. . . .*' The organist launched into his latest achievement : the Gavotte from Mignon.

Outside the church the summer sunlight seemed more exhilarating than ever. It was worth while, Edwin thought, to have suffered the dreariness of the morning's service to experience this curious feeling of lightness and relief. He supposed that he was not alone in this sensation; for the crowd that moved slowly from the churchyard gates with a kind of gathering resilience was a happy crowd, and its voices that at first were hushed soon became

gay and irresponsible in spite of the slight awkwardness that its Sunday clothes imposed on it. No doubt they were anticipating their Sunday dinner, for, as Edwin had noticed, the liturgy of the Church of England has some value as an *apéritif*. Even Aunt Laura was full of a subdued playfulness. 'What a shame, Albert,' she said, 'that the rector didn't appoint you to collect to-day.' She patted his arm.

'Oh, I don't know, my dear. . . . It wasn't my turn, you know.'

'Oh, I know that,' said Aunt Laura, 'but on a day like this it would have been rather a delicate compliment. I must speak to the rector about it.'

'I don't think I should do that,' said Uncle Albert, with some alarm.

She laughed gently. 'Don't be an old juggins,' she said.

All down the High Street, in the moving crowd, Edwin could smell the savour of roast beef and baked potatoes and cabbage water wafted from innumerable kitchen windows. . . .

IV

In the afternoon they left Aunt Laura and Uncle Albert asleep in two arm-chairs on opposite sides of the drawing-room fireplace, and Edwin and his father went for a walk by the old abbey fish-ponds It was the first time for many years that Edwin had been for a walk with his father, and the experience promised a new and exciting intimacy to which he looked forward with eagerness.

Even at this hour of the day the Sabbath atmosphere imposed itself on the countryside. The road that they followed was long and straight

with an open frontage above the reedy pools, and along the cinder path at the side of it a great number of men were lounging: a strange and foreign population of miners from the Mawne pits, who only emerged from their cavernous occupation on this day of the week, and other industrial workers from the great steel rolling mills that lay in the Stour Valley to westward.

None of them took any notice of Edwin and his father. It was even doubtful if they knew who they were; for these men passed a curiously separate existence, and Mr Ingleby would only be familiar to their wives who did the family shopping on Saturday nights while their masters were waiting for the football results in their favourite pubs. On this day the miner's passion for sport of all kinds asserted itself in the presence of a great number of slim, jacketed whippets, each warranted to beat anything on four legs for speed, slinking tenderly at their masters' heels.

It seemed strange to Edwin that his father should know none of these men. It showed him again how remote and solitary the man's life must have been in this ultimate corner of the Black Country. 'We don't really belong here,' he thought. 'We're foreigners. . . .' And the reflection pleased him, though he remembered, with a tinge of regret, that by this denial he dissociated himself from his old idol the poet of the Pastoral Ballad.

Soon they left the cinder path behind, and plunged into a green lane descending to a water-mill, turned by the tawny Stour, as yet unsullied by the refuse of factories. At a sandstone bridge, whose parapet was deeply carved with the initials of lovers long since dead or disillusioned, they paused, and, for the first time, began to talk.

'It's a funny thing, father,' Edwin said, 'but I don't even know where we are going to-morrow. . . .'

Mr Ingleby smiled. 'Don't you, Edwin? Well, the doctor said it would be best for me to go to my native air; and it struck me as rather a good plan. I never went there with your mother. It belonged to another life. It is quite twenty years since I have been in Somerset.'

'Somerset . . .? I didn't even know it was Somerset.'

'No. . . . Well, as I say, it was another world.'

Somerset. . . . Edwin's imagination began to play with the word. He could remember very little: only a huge green county sprawling on a map with rivers . . . yes, and hills. A county stretched beside the Severn Sea. The Severn again! A western county. Cheddar cheese. Lorna Doone. Cider. Coleridge. Sedgemoor.

'But what part of Somerset?'

'The eastern end.'

That was a pity. The farther west the better.

'I suppose it's rather a flat county?'

'A great part of it. Did you ever hear of Mendip?

> 'The rugged miners poured to war
> From Mendip's sunless caves.'

'Yes, of course. . . .'

'I came from a little village on the top of Mendip. Twenty years ago it was decaying. Now I expect there's next to nothing left of it. Twenty years makes a lot of difference. It's made a lot of difference to me.'

'And what was the name of the village?'

'I don't suppose you will ever have heard it. It was called Highberrow.'

'Highberrow. . . . no. It's a jolly name.'

'I don't think it ever struck me in that light.'

'Highberrow. . . . is it right in the hills?'

'Yes . . . quite high up. I don't know how many hundreds of feet. I wasn't interested in that sort of thing then. It lies right under Axdown, the highest point of the range. On a clear day you can see right over the Bristol Channel into Wales. All the mountains there. The Brecon Beacons. The Sugarloaf. The Black Mountain.'

'The Black Mountain. But how strange. Why, when you were a little boy you must have been nearly able to see the place where mother lived. With a big sea between. It must have been wonderful . . .'

'Yes . . . I suppose it was. I scarcely remember. Look right down in that deep pool. That's a trout.'

'A trout. . . . Where? Do show me . . .'

The vision of Mendip faded instantly, and Edwin only saw the rufous sands of the pool beneath the bridge, and in it a shadowy elongated figure with its head to the slow stream and faintly quivering fins. In Devonshire, Widdup had told him, the rivers swarmed with trout: you could catch them all day long if you wanted to, and Edwin, loyal to his own county's excellences, had only been able to produce the silvery roach of the millpool, shoaling round the water-lilies and the mythical legend of carnivorous pike lurking in Mr Willis's ponds in the Holloway. He wished he had known that there were veritable trout in the Stour. Now it was too late to do anything; but when they returned from their holiday, he determined that he would catch this shadowy creature, even if he had to induce it to gorge a worm. Still, it was quite possible

that by the time he returned he would have captured many trout. For Somerset lay next to Devon on the map.

'Are there many trout in Mendip?' he asked.

'No. . . . There is only one river of any size. The Ax, that runs underground and comes out of Axcombe gorge, and there are practically no trout in the Ax. It's a dry country. Limestone. Very barren too.'

That didn't really matter. In a day or two Edwin would be able to see for himself. On their way home they spoke very little. His father seemed to find it difficult to talk to him; and in a little while Edwin became conscious of his own unending string of questions that led nowhere.

But all that night he dreamed of Mendip. A vast, barren, mountain-country, his dreams pictured it; waterless, and honeycombed with the dark caves from which Macaulay's miners had poured to war; a deserted countryside full of broken villages and bounded by steep cliffs against which the isolating waters of the Severn Sea broke in a soundless tumult. And there Ax, the sacred river, ran through caverns measureless to man. A fluent gentleman with a noble brow and burning gray eyes pointed out the course of the river to him. He was the only other soul beside Edwin and his father, in all that desert country, and Edwin introduced him to Mr Ingleby as Mr Coleridge—rather diffidently, for he was not sure how the poet would take it until he remembered and explained that Keats was a chemist. There, on the high crown of Axdown, his mother joined them. She, it seemed, was not afraid of Mr Coleridge. She took his arm so familiarly that Edwin trembled for her; but the poet only smiled, while she pointed out to him a

mass of huge fantastic mountains ranged beyond the gleaming sea. 'You've got to look over there,' she said. 'You see that level ridge dropping suddenly? Well, it's the third farm from the end. Can you see the little bedroom window on the extreme left? . . . quite a little window?' Coleridge nodded, and Mr Ingleby, too, shielded his eyes with his hands and looked. 'It was my last chance of showing it to you,' she said.

'But there are practically no trout in the Alph,' said Coleridge.

CHAPTER XI

THE THRESHOLD

I

The next evening, when Edwin and his father reached Bristol, a steady drizzle had set in from the west. They pushed their bicycles out of the station yard at Temple Meads and rode between slippery tramway lines towards a small hotel, a stone's-throw from Bristol Bridge, where Mr Ingleby had decided to put up for the night. 'It's no use trying to ride on to Wringford this evening,' he said, 'for the wind will be against us and it's collar work most of the way. I think we can be comfortable here to-night. I used to know the landlord of this place. He was a Mendip man.'

The Mendip landlord, of course, had been dead for many years, having made his descent by the route that is particularly easy for licensed victuallers; but it happened that his daughter had married the new tenant, and this woman, a comfortable creature who spoke with the slight burr that appeared in Mr Ingleby's speech in times of anger or any other violent emotion, welcomed them for her father's sake, and gave them a bare but cleanly room on the second story.

The windows of this room looked down obliquely on to the tidal basin of the Avon, thronged with small coasting tramps and sailing ships : and Edwin was content to stay there watching them; for he had never seen the traffic of a harbour before. It was still too wet to think of going out on to the

quays; but even from a distance the misty spectacle, enveloped in veils of driving rain, was romantic.

Edwin watched while a pair of busy tugboats pushed and pulled and worried the hull of a wooden schooner in to mid-stream. The water was high, and she was due to catch the falling tide to Avonmouth. Whither was she bound? He did not know. Perhaps her way lay down channel to pick up a cargo of bricks from Bridgewater. Perhaps she was setting out at that moment to essay the icy passage of the Horn. Perhaps, in another four months, she would have doubled the Cape and lie wallowing in the torpid seas about Zanzibar. It inspired Edwin to think that he was standing at one of the gateways of the world. From the site of the stone bridge above their lodging, just four hundred years ago, the Venetian pilot, Cabot, had cast loose in the selfsame way, and sailed westward with his three sons, Lewes, Sebastyan, and Sancto, to the mainland of unknown America. To-day, from the same wet quays, other adventurous prows were stretching forth to the ends of the earth. To China. . . . To Africa. *Here begins the sea that ends not till the world's end.*

With his accustomed curiosity as to the origins of his own emotions Edwin was not long in deciding that his growing eagerness to see the beauty and strangeness of the world must have sprung from the fact that his ancestors had lived upon the shores of this great waterway. From Highberrow, his father had told him, you could see the whole expanse of the Bristol Channel. From Highberrow, perhaps, some forbear of his own had watched the caravels of Cabot setting down channel with the ebb tide. He was bewildered with the splendour of his heritage. It was impossible to imagine

that Sir Joseph Hingston's family had the least share in such a romantic past.

In the evening, after supper, the rain ceased, and Mr Ingleby proposed that they should go for a walk through the city. He had known it well in his youth, and it seemed to fill him with an almost childish delight to show Edwin the things that he remembered. They passed through many narrow winding streets where the overhanging houses of the merchant venturers stood, and ancient churches had been huddled into corners by the growing city. 'I remember every inch of it,' said Mr Ingleby, with a happy laugh. Again they crossed the river, and skirting a line of shipping warehouses, now cavernous and deserted, they plunged into a sordid quarter full of sailors' drinking dens that smelled of rum, and marine stores that smelled of tar.

'Where are we going?' Edwin asked.

'You'll see in a minute,' said Mr Ingleby. And, in a minute, Edwin saw.

They had emerged from the huddled houses into a large open space, and in the midst of it rose a miracle of beauty such as Edwin had never seen before: a structure too delicate in its airy loveliness to have been built of stone; so fragile in its strength that it seemed impossible that the slender flying buttresses should support it. The shadowy spire could be seen dimly piercing a sky that had been washed to clearness by the rain; but inside the church, for some reason unknown, the lamps had been lighted, and the whole building glowed as though it had been one immense lantern. There could not be another miracle of this kind in the world, Edwin thought.

He remembered a white model of the Taj Mahal

at Agra, that stood beneath a dome of glass in Mrs Barrow's drawing-room, an intricate carving of ivory with a huge dome and many fretted minarets. Edwin remembered that the Taj Mahal was supposed to be one of the wonders of the world; but he could not believe that it was as beautiful as this: it was too fanciful, too complicated in its detail, while this church, for all its delicacy, was so amazingly simple in its design.

'St Mary Redcliffe,' said Mr Ingleby. 'I always thought it was a fine church, but I don't think I ever saw it lit up like this before.' He paused, and they gazed at the church for a little while in silence. 'It's a funny thing,' he said at last, 'that a great master can sign a picture and the name of a poet be remembered by his writings, while the greatest artists of the Middle Ages, people who planned and built wonderful things like this . . . and I suppose it is more beautiful to-day than when it was first finished . . . should be quite forgotten. A funny thing. . . . I should think the man who made this church must have devoted his life to it.'

Edwin glowed. It came as a delightful surprise to him that his father should think of a thing like this. He was ashamed to confess that he hadn't believed him capable of it. It was the sort of thing that he would only have expected of his mother. 'What a rotten little snob I am,' he thought. And though he happened to know, quite by accident, from the Rowley Poems of Chatterton, that the builder of Redcliffe was William Cannynge, round whose shadowy reputation the work of the wondrous boy had grown, he could not for the life of him reveal this piece of learning, since it would have spoiled the originality of his father's

reflection. He only said, 'Yes,' but the train of thought was so strong in him that he couldn't resist asking Mr Ingleby if he knew which was the muniment room.

'The muniment room. Why?'

'Because it was in the muniment room that Chatterton pretended that he found the Rowley manuscripts.'

'Chatterton? Ah, yes. . . . Thomas Chatterton, the poet.'

'Yes.'

'I'm afraid I don't know. I never read any of his poems, but I believe he starved in London and committed suicide with Arsenious Oxide.'

This gleam of professional interest tickled Edwin. Keats : Keatings. Chatterton : Arsenious Oxide.

'They found Arsenic on his lips. He made no mistake about it. The lethal dose is a very small one. A grain or so would have done it. Why, it's beginning to rain again. We'd better go. I hope it will clear up by to-morrow.'

They walked back to their lodging in a fine drizzle. On the way Edwin's father took his arm. The action gave Edwin a curious sensation. It suggested to him that his father was lonely; that the natural instinct of love in the man was making him eager for some sort of sympathy. It was pitiable; for, in reality, they were strangers . . . there was no getting away from the fact that they were strangers.

'I must make it easy for him,' Edwin thought. 'However impossible it may seem, I must make it easy. I must know him. I must love him. Whatever it costs I must love him. It is ridiculous that I should have to choose my words and even at times be a little dishonest when it ought to be

the most natural and easy thing in the world to be myself with him. Of course it's difficult at present; but later on, when we know each other better, it will be all right.'

When they returned to their lodging their clothes were wet, and they went together into the kitchen of the defunct publican's daughter. She gave them two of her husband's coats to wear while their own were drying, and for a long time they sat over the fire talking to her. It was evident that though Mr Ingleby was himself unknown to her, she knew all about his family; for she asked him many questions about various people in Highberrow and Wringford, whom they knew in common. Mr Ingleby could tell her very little, but the landlady was able to supply him with a lot of gossip from the Mendip villages.

'We heard that you were married,' she said.

'Yes,' replied Mr Ingleby. 'But I've just had a great blow. I've lost my wife.'

'Dear, dear . . . that's very sad for 'ee.'

'Yes. . . . I shall never get over it.'

'And this is your eldest? My word, how time flies!'

'Yes. . . . He's the only one.'

'To look at him at first you wouldn't say there was much of an Ingleby in him.'

'No. He takes after his mother's family.'

'And yet, on second thoughts, he's got a look of your brother William's boy, Joe, about his eyes. Now that's a strange thing. Talking of your brother William, I haven't seen or heard of him for years.'

'I haven't seen him for twenty years myself. We're cycling to Wringford to-morrow. We shall put up with him.'

'Well, remember me to him. He was always a great favourite of dad's.'

'Will's a good fellow.'

'I suppose he's in the same place? Mr Grisewood would be a fool to get rid of a man like that. Good gardeners are scarce. . . .'

Edwin could not understand this at all. It was obvious that the woman must be making some mistake; for it was clearly impossible that his Uncle William could be a gardener. Still, his father offered no protest.

'They tell me,' she went on in her soft West-country voice, 'that he've apprenticed that boy Joe to Hares, the shoeing-smith.'

'I didn't know that,' said Mr Ingleby.

'Well, of course, it *may* be all right,' the landlady went on, 'but there's always the future to think on. My husband always says that the day of the horse is over. What with steam and electricity, and these new things that I see in the paper they are running from London to Brighton! There's a gentleman near Bridgwater who has one of these new motor-cars on the road. Of course, I suppose they are fairly reliable on the flat.'

Edwin was thankful that the excitements of motor traction had diverted her from the uncomfortable subject of his cousin's profession . . . if that were the right word to apply to the calling of a shoeing-smith; but the matter still troubled and bewildered him when they went upstairs to bed. It was one that would not wait for explanation, and so he tackled his father as soon as they were alone.

'Father, what was that woman talking about? What did she mean when she said that Uncle Will was a gardener?'

'What did she mean?' Mr Ingleby laughed. 'Why

she meant what she said. He *is* a gardener. He's never been anything else.'

'But, father. . . . it's impossible.'

'It isn't impossible, boy. It's the truth. Didn't you know? Didn't mother ever tell you?'

'No. . . . I don't think she ever spoke of him. I . . . I can't understand it.'

'You sound as if it had come as a shock to you, Eddie.'

'No. . . . yes. . . . I suppose it did.'

'You didn't imagine that you'd find your ancestry in Debrett, Eddie?'

'No . . . but that's different. It's . . . it's sort of bowled me over.'

Mr Ingleby laughed. It seemed that he was really amused at Edwin's consternation.

'I suppose it's natural for a schoolboy to be a bit snobbish,' he said.

'No. . . . it isn't that. Honestly it isn't, father. Only I'd kind of taken us for granted. I wish you'd tell me all about it. You see, I know absolutely nothing.'

'It's a long story, Eddie. But of course I'll tell you. Then you won't have any more of these distressing surprises. Suppose you get into bed first.'

It was a strange sight to Edwin to see his father kneel down in his Jaeger nightgown and pray. The boy had never done that since his second term at St Luke's.

II

Lying in bed with his father's arm about him, Edwin listened to a long and strange narration that overwhelmed him with alternations of humiliation that made him ashamed, and of romance that

thrilled him. Mr Ingleby began at the beginning. Their family had lived, it appeared, for years without number, in the village of Highberrow on Mendip in a combe beneath the great camp of Silbury, and the calling of all these Inglebys had been that of the other inhabitants of Highberrow: they were miners, working for lead in the seams that the Romans, and perhaps the Phœnicians before them, had discovered in the mountain limestone. Even so early as in the youth of Edwin's father the industry had been decaying, for the traditional methods of the Mendip miner were unscientific: he had been content to dig for himself a shallow working from which he collected enough of the mineral that is called calamine to keep him in pocket and in drink.

'We Mendip folk,' said Mr Ingleby, 'are a strange people, very different in our physique from the broad Saxons of the turf-moors beneath us. I suppose there is a good deal of Cornish blood in us. Wherever there are mines there are Cornishmen; but I think there's another, older strain: Iberian . . . Roman . . . Phœnician. I don't know what it is; but I *do* know that we're somehow different from all the rest of the Somerset people: a violent, savage sort of folk. Did you ever hear of Hannah More?'

'No.' Edwin had been born too late in the century.

'Well, she was before my time too; but she made the Mendip miners notorious by trying to convert them. I don't suppose she succeeded. At any-rate neither she nor her influences would ever have converted your grandfather. He was a wonderful man. Even though my memory is mostly of the way in which I was afraid of him, I can see what

a wonderful man he was. And your Uncle Will would tell you the same.'

'He was a miner . . .?'

'Yes. . . . A miner amongst other things. He was a dowser too.

'A dowser? What is that?'

'Don't you know? The divining-rod. A thing that all the scientists have been unable to explain. In a dry country like Mendip the dowser is a most important person; for neither man nor beast can live without water, and he is the only person who can tell where a well should be sunk. Your grandfather was a strange looking man with very clear gray eyes under a black head of hair and heavy bristling brows. Even when he grew very old his hair and his beard were black.

'I was the youngest of the family. All the others, except your Uncle Will, have died—and for some reason or other I was not brought up in my father's cottage but in that of my grandmother, a tiny, tumbledown affair lying in the valley under Silbury. We were very humble people, Eddie. I don't suppose anywhere in the world I could have passed a quieter childhood. It's a long way off now. One only remembers curious, unimportant things.

When I was four years old I was sent to the village school. I don't think it exists any longer. You see the population of Highberrow disappeared naturally with the abandonment of the mining. Even in my childhood, as I told you, the workings were running pretty thin. The miners were beginning to find that they couldn't pick up much of a living on their own calamine claims; and so they drifted back gradually—your grandfather along with them—to the oldest workings of all: the mines that the Romans had made two thousand

years ago. You may be certain that the Romans, with their thoroughness, hadn't left much behind. Why, in their days, Mendip must have been a great place, with a harbour of its own on the mouth of the Ax, and great roads radiating everywhere: to Cirencester, Exeter, and Bath. Even in the Middle Ages there was a population of fifty thousand souls on Mendip. Now I don't suppose there are a thousand in all the mining villages put together.

'So my father went to work in the Roman mines at Cold Harbour; for a new company had been started that was reclaiming the sublimated lead that had been left in the Romans' flues. And there, as a little boy, I used to carry him his dinner, through the heather, over the side of Axdown. You'll see Axdown for yourself to-morrow: a great bow of a hill. There used to be a pair of ravens that built there. I've seen them rising in great wide circles. They seemed very big to me. I was almost frightened of them; and when I found the skeleton of a sheep one day on the top of Axdown under the barrows, I made sure that the ravens had killed it.

'I suppose I was a pretty intelligent boy. I know that the men at the workings by Cold Harbour, where I took father's dinner, used to joke with me a good deal. They used to like the way in which I hit back at them with my tongue. Father didn't take any notice of it. He was always the same dark, silent man, with very few words, and no feelings, as you'd imagine, except the violent passions into which he would burst out when he'd been drinking. He didn't often drink, though. He was a good man, Eddie. A good man. . . . And so I myself came to work in the mines.'

'I can't believe it, you know, father. It's so unlike you . . . and mother.'

'Of course it was long before I knew your mother. And it does seem funny, looking back on it. I'm very glad now, mind you, that I had the experience. It's a fine thing for any man at some time of his life to have had to face the necessity of earning his living by the use of his hands. You'll never know what that means, I suppose. It's a pity. . . .

'Well, while I was working at Cold Harbour, my mother died. I forgot to tell you that Grannie had died some years before, and her cottage under Silbury had been left empty—there was no one living in Highberrow to fill it—and was already tumbling into ruins. I haven't told you about your grandmother—my mother. I don't know that I can tell you much. I think she was in some ways a little hard. I don't know. . . . I thought the world of her, and perhaps it was my father's difficult nature that made her seem harder than she was. Besides, being brought up with Grannie, I was a sort of stranger to her. I don't know how father came across her. There's no doubt about it, she was a superior woman. If you're still feeling a little sore about your social origin, Eddie, you can console yourself with the fact that she had a cousin who was a solicitor—or was it a solicitor's clerk?—somewhere near London. At any rate, poor soul, she died. She was ill for several months, and I, being the youngest, had to stay at home and nurse her. In was in that way that I met Doctor Marshall. . . .

'I'll tell you about him in a moment; but thinking of the days of my mother's death puts me in mind of a strange thing that happened at the time that will show you what sort of man your grandfather

was. Early on in the family there had been a girl that died to whom my mother was particularly devoted; and a little before the end—she knew that it couldn't be many weeks—mother told my father that she would like to be buried in a particular corner of the churchyard near to this daughter of theirs.

'Father never spoke of it. He rarely spoke of anything. But I suppose he took it in all the same. Anyway, when she was dead, the old sexton came up to see father about the grave, and he told him where she had said she wanted to lie. The next night the sexton came up again. I can see him now—a funny, old-fashioned little man with red whiskers—and said it couldn't be done, because the soil was so shallow at that particular point. I can see my father now. He hadn't been drinking; but he flew suddenly into such a black rage that the poor little gravedigger (Satell was his name) ran out frightened for his life. I think I was pretty frightened too, for father went out after him carrying one of the great iron bars that the miners use for drilling. I thought for a moment that the loss of mother had turned his head. It hadn't. He just went there and then, in the night, to the churchyard, and worked away with his mining tools at the rock that poor old Satell said he couldn't dig. He bored his holes and he blasted the rock with the black powder they used in those days, and he dug my mother's grave in the place where she wanted it. You see what a strange man he was! You may say what you like, Eddie—I've often thought of it since—but that was a grandfather worth having.'

'Yes . . . he was worth having,' Edwin agreed.

'But I was speaking of Dr Marshall,' his father

continued. 'He was the beginning of my new life. But for the accident of my mother's illness I don't suppose I should ever have met him. During the last month he came fairly often : not that he could do much good for her, poor thing, but because she *was*—it's a wretched phrase—a superior woman, and because no doubt she liked to talk to him, and he knew it. Practice in Highberrow can't have been very profitable; though I'm sure that my father paid him every penny that he owed him. He was that kind of man.

'And when she died, Dr Marshall took a fancy to me. I could tell you a good deal about him if it were worth while. He was a physician of the old school, learned in experience rather than in books. It is probable that he made mistakes; but I'm equally certain that he learned by them. The week after mother died he asked your grandfather if he could have me to wash bottles and make myself generally useful in his surgery at Axcombe. And my father didn't refuse. It would have been unlike him if he had done so; for I think his idea in life was to let every individual work out his own salvation for himself. It was a good plan, for it made the responsibility definite. . . .

'So I went to Axcombe to Dr Marshall's house. There was plenty of hard work in it. I think a country doctor earns a poor living more honestly than most men. I had to share the doctor's work—getting up early in the morning (that was no hardship to a miner's son)—to clean up the surgery (and I can tell you it took some cleaning), to turn out of bed in the middle of the night to harness the pony if the message that called him took him over roads, or to saddle the cob if the hill tracks were too rough for wheels.

Sometimes I had long night journeys on my own; for the doctor, in spite of his practical head for dealing with disease, was curiously unmethodical and would often leave behind the particular instrument that he wanted most, and in the middle of the night a boy of my own age from one of the hill villages would come battering at the door as though his life depended on it. And they'd go on battering, you know, as if they thought that the sound of it would make me get up more quickly. Perhaps it did: at any rate I can remember scrambling downstairs in the dark and reading the notes that the doctor sent by candlelight: and then I would turn out, half asleep, and walk over the hills above Axcombe when the gorge was swimming to the brim with fine milky mist and a single step, if one were silly enough to go dreaming, would have sent one spinning down a sheer four hundred feet like the hunting king in the legend. I'm forgetting that you don't know the legend and have never seen the gorge. . . .

Still, I shall never forget those strange night-journeys. I don't think I had begun to appreciate Mendip until I walked the hills at night. I found that I could think so clearly, and I was just beginning, you see, to have so much to think about. Books. . . .

'At Highberrow, in my father's cottage, there were only two books altogether: the Bible, and a tract by Miss Hannah More called "The Religion of the Fashionable World." But Doctor Marshall's house at Axcombe was crammed with books: rubbish, most of them, I expect; but printed books; and whenever I was not working I was reading. It was the pure excitement of attaining knowledge

of any kind that made me read; and of course I wasted a great deal of valuable time in ways that were unprofitable. The doctor did not help me much; he was far too busy to worry much about my education; but I know that he approved of my eagerness, and liked to see me reading. I used to sleep in the loft above the stable in those days, and I know that my candles made him rather nervous of fire. But he *did* help me, in his own way. He put me on to a little Latin, with the strictly practical idea of making it more easy for me to dispense the prescriptions that he wrote in the old manner without abbreviations; and he also introduced me to another book that I don't suppose you've ever heard of: called *Religio Medici* by Sir Thomas Browne.'

'I know it,' said Edwin.

'Do you? I supposed it was merely a medical curiosity. Latin, he thought, would be useful to me in other ways. You see, like many of the old medical practitioners that spent their lives in the lanes, he was very interested in botany: not scientific botany—just the identification and botanical names of the flowers that blossomed year by year in the hedges. In the early summer he would drive home with the bottom of the dogcart tangled with flowers that he had picked while he walked the pony up some hill; and he would pitch them over to me and tell me to learn the names of them. It wasn't very difficult; for in the surgery shelves there was a fine set of Ann Pratt with excellent illustrations. And sometimes he would come home with a small insect of some kind in a pillbox and arrange it under the microscope on the table under the dispensary window; and he'd say, "Wonderful . . . wonderful!" not because he'd made any

biological observations, but just because it revealed a lot of unsuspected detail.

It was a favourite trick of his to show his patients a sample of their own blood corpuscles under the microscope too. "There they are," he'd say, "like a pile of golden guineas, and if you had a millionth part as many guineas as you have of these in your body, you'd be the richest man in England." This sort of thing used to impress his patients tremendously. And he knew it. I suppose it gave them confidence in him; though he didn't need any superstitious aids of this kind. The whole history of his life as a doctor should have been enough to make them trust him. Still, I suppose it was the old tradition of the medicine man who dealt in curious magic. His common sense and the craftsmanship that he had won by experience were his real guarantees.

'He was extraordinarily practical in everything except money matters. In these, even I could have taught him a good deal. It was a pathetic sight to see him making out his bills. He always put off the evil day, with the result that they were only sent out about once in three years. I don't suppose doctors can afford to be like that in these days. . . . But then, what was the use of money to him? All his tastes were simple and inexpensive. He was unmarried. During all the years that I was with him he never took a holiday, unless it were to go to Taunton and buy a new horse. I do not think there are many of his kind left.

'You can see, though, what a huge difference he made to my life. If I hadn't gone to live with him at Axcombe, I might still have been a miner—if there *are* any miners left on Mendip—or perhaps a gardener like your Uncle Will. And where would

you have been, Eddie? He was careful, and I think very wisely careful, not to turn my head. "Ambition," he would say to me, "is all very well in moderation. But don't be too ambitious, John. Happiness is more important in this life than success, and very few men have a full share of both. Still, you're a sharp lad, and there's no reason why you shouldn't get on in the world and be happy too if you don't expect too much." As time went on we began to talk a little about my future. "Don't be in too much of a hurry," he used to say. "You're young, and there's plenty of time ahead of you."

'Of course it would be ridiculous to suppose that I hadn't ambitions. Naturally enough, I had determined to be a doctor like my master. The small things that I did for him convinced me that it would be an easy matter. When he was out in the country people who had walked in from remote villages would ask me to prescribe for them, and sometimes, with an immense sense of importance, I would do so. It wasn't difficult. He ran his practice, to all intents and purposes, on three stock mixtures and half a dozen pills. But I shall never forget one evening when one of my father's fellow workmen from Highberrow came in with a raging toothache, and I, being anxious to show off, volunteered to take the tooth out for him. I remember I showed him a microscopic sample of his own blood as a preliminary. But when I came to take out the tooth I made a mess of it. He was a tremendous big fellow with jaws like steel, and though I pulled hard enough to move him in the chair, I only succeeded in breaking the tooth and making the pain worse. I got my head well smacked for my trouble, and decided that whatever

else I were to be, I wouldn't risk dentistry as a career.

'"There's no reason," the doctor would say, "why you shouldn't make a good chemist in time." Of course that seemed a very small thing to me; and yet . . . think what I might have been! I was sixteen, just your own age, Eddie, when he died. Of course he killed himself, as many doctors do, with work. People make a great fuss when a missionary in some outlandish country lays down his life, as they call it, for his flock. But country doctors are doing that every month in the year all over England—I don't mean the social successes in Harley Street—and from what I've seen of it their widows can't count on much gratitude.

It was a hard winter . . . the year eighteen sixty-seven . . . and there happened to be a great deal of illness in the hills. We were worked pretty hard, both of us, but the doctor had no chance of taking a rest: he was the only medical man living within ten miles: and in the end he, too, caught a heavy cold, and had to go on working through it. In the end he had to give up. It was pneumonia; and the last thing he did was to write a letter asking a consultant in Bristol to come down and see him. He was a kindly man, but I suppose Doctor Marshall was to him only a case. The old fellow refused to have any one but me to nurse him. "John and I understand each other," he said.

'It was a terrible battle: to see a great strong man like that fighting for breath. They didn't give oxygen in those days. It went on for four days and on the fifth, or rather in the middle of the night—he called to me faintly, and I found him lying on his back breathing more softly, very pale and drenched with sweat. "This is the crisis . . .

fifth day . . ." he said. He told me to cover him with all the blankets I could find, to give him some brandy, and to take his temperature. It was a funny job for a boy. I had never seen a great man suddenly go weak like that. His temperature had fallen below normal. " Ah . . ." he said. " I thought so. . . . Brandy. . . ."

'But he couldn't take it himself. " You've got to be the doctor now, John," he said. There wasn't any more fight left in him. All that day he hardly spoke at all, but at night he called me to his side and told me to make a bonfire of all the books and the bills we'd been making out the week before. " I shan't want any more money," he said. " But *you* will . . . a little. . . . I've seen to that. You're a good lad. Don't aim too high. And don't think too much about money. Money is the root of all evil. . . ."

'I scarcely took any notice of what he said. I only knew that I was going to lose the only friend I had. He died early next morning, and I was just like a dog : I couldn't bring myself to leave him.

'I stayed in the house . . . you see, it seemed as if I couldn't go anywhere else, until after the funeral. Then the lawyers told me that he had left me a hundred and fifty pounds in his will. It seemed to me a tremendous lot of money. I didn't realise what a little way it would go; but it seemed to make my dreams possible. I would be a doctor, like him . . . as near like him as it was possible to be. That was my first idea; but then I remembered what he had told me, and decided that it would be better to become a chemist first. In that way I could make sure of my living.

'I left Axcombe. It was necessary that I should go to some big city to study and more or less

by accident I chose North Bromwich. It was a tremendous change for me who had lived all my life in the country: I was very lonely and awkward at first. But that wasn't the worst of it. I began to discover my own ignorance: to see that, as a matter of fact, I knew nothing but the homely routine of the doctor's surgery, the names of a few drugs and their doses, a smattering of Latin, and the botany of the local wild flowers. I knew nothing of life. I couldn't even pull out a tooth without breaking it.

'It came as an awful shock to me. I began to see the reasons of the doctor's cautious advice. I realised that I had a great deal of the dreamer in me. I rather think that you have it too, Eddie. No doubt it comes to both of us from those strange, dark, mining-people. I saw that I should have to pull myself together and drive myself hard if my ambitions were not to end in disaster. I had to pinch and scrape. I had to set out and learn the most elementary things from the beginning. I had thought that my fortune was made. Perhaps it was a wise thing that the doctor had left me no more money. It taught me that nobody could make my fortune but myself.

'It was a hard fight, I can tell you: for while I was building my schemes for the future I had to provide for the present. You see I had soon realised that it wouldn't do to spend any of my little capital. I won't tell you now how I lived. It would be too long a story. But I can assure you that I had a hard time in North Bromwich, getting all my dreams knocked out of me one by one, thirsting—literally thirsting for clean air and country ways.

It sounds rather like a tract, but it's quite true to say that town life has a lot of temptations too for a country boy. I could see everywhere

the power of money and the luxuries that money could purchase without realising the work that money represents, and all this was very disconcerting to a boy of my temperament with more than a hundred pounds in the bank. Still, as it happened, nothing went wrong. In the day-time I worked with my hands. At night I tried to educate myself, very slowly, very hardly—for in those days poor people had not the opportunities of education that are open to them in these. I sometimes wonder if people to-day realise the difference.

'I worked on quietly for years, never wasting a penny or an hour. Don't take it for virtue in me. It wasn't that. It was just that the old doctor's influence on me had been sound and I couldn't afford to do otherwise. As a matter of fact I suppose there must have been hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young men in that city in exactly the same situation. Only I didn't know one of them. I was lonely . . . absolutely solitary. I never heard an accent of my own country's speech. I never saw a patch of real green or a sky that hadn't smoke in it. I made my friends in books: not the kind of books that you've been brought up on—I hadn't time for poetry or frills of that kind: books of solid facts: knowledge for the sake of knowledge. You see all the things that you would take for granted, having known them as a birthright, so to speak, were new and unknown to me. One book was a sort of gospel to me. It was called *Self Help*, written by a man named Smiles.

'So when you hear of a self-made man it may not mean much; but a self-educated man, I can tell you, means a good deal. In the end, of course, I gradually came within sight of my ambition. From a van-driver to a firm of wholesale chemists

I became an assistant, an apprentice in their retail house. I took my examinations. I qualified as a dispensing chemist. Later, by a curious piece of chance, I met your mother. We became friends. She was the first person in whom I had confided since I left Mendip. She seemed to understand. It was a strange thing for me, after all those years, to be able to talk about myself. I can't tell you what a wonderful relief it was. And then we found that we loved one another and married. We went out into the country near North Bromwich to find a village to make a home in, and we came across Halesby. The place was very different from what it is now twenty years ago. We were very happy. No. . . . I won't talk about it. But you can see now, that behind your life there were quite a lot of complicated things that don't appear on the surface. It's really better that you should know them.'

'It makes me love you, father,' said Edwin. 'Because, of course, it is all so wonderful. I expect. if I had been you I should still have been in Axcombe. I don't think I could have done what you did.'

'You might have done a great deal more. There's no knowing what's in us until we are tried. That sounds like Samuel Smiles; but it's quite true. At any rate it's time we were asleep, boy. I think the rain has stopped.'

They said good-night, and Edwin kissed his father; but for several hours later he heard the clocks of Bristol chiming. In a little time he knew by the quiet breathing of his father that he was asleep, and hearing this sound and thinking of the grey man who lay beside him, he was overwhelmed with an emotion in which pity and passionate devotion were curiously mingled. He felt strangely protective, as though it were the man who had fought such a

hard battle who was weak, and he, who had never endured anything, were the stronger.

He conceived it a kind of sacred duty to see that for all the rest of his life his father should never suffer any pain or even discomfort from which he could protect him. It was a more vivid version of the feeling that had bowled him over once before, when they had knelt together after his mother's death. It was a wholly illogical sentiment—and yet, when he came to think it over, he came to the conclusion that something of the same kind must have underlain his mother's tenderness towards his father. He was eager to persuade himself that there was no compassion in it : only love and admiration.

'He is the most wonderful man in the world,' he thought, 'and I never knew it.' Remorse overcame him when he remembered that once, at St Luke's, he had been ashamed of Mr Ingleby's calling. There couldn't be another chap in the school who had a father that was a patch on him. He remembered a more recent cause for shame : the shiver of discomfort that the landlady's revelation of his Uncle Will's occupation had given him. He had thought that a gardener uncle would be an uncomfortable skeleton in the cupboard of a Fellow of Balliol. Instead of that he now knew that he should have been proud of it : he should have been proud of anything in the world that did honour to his father. Everything that he was, every shred of culture that he possessed had its origin in the devotion and the sufferings of this wonderful man, and, whatever happened, he determined that he would be worthy of them.

The cathedral clock slowly chimed two. Edwin turned over and fell asleep in a mood of strange, exalted happiness.

CHAPTER XII

THE HILLS

Under a sky of rain-washed blue they had left Bristol, and after an hour of hard riding came to an easy upland plateau where the road lay white and clear before them, so clean between its wide margins of rough turf, that it seemed to have some affinity with the sky. On their way they had met few people, but the carters with whom they had exchanged a morning greeting were all smiling and friendly, very different from the surly colliers that slouched about the cinder-paths at Halesby.

'Good-maarnin',' they said, and the very dialect was friendly.

'We're over the worst of the road,' said Mr Ingleby. 'In a minute or two we shall see the hills.'

And, from a final crest, the road suddenly fell steeply through the scattered buildings of a hamlet. An inn, with a wide space for carts to turn in, stood on a sort of platform at the right-hand side of the highway, and in front of the travellers lay the mass of Mendip: the black bow of Axdown with its shaggy flanks, the level cliffs of Callow, and a bold seaward spur, so lost in watery vapours that it might well have claimed its ancient continuity with the islands that swam beyond in the grey sea. In the light of his new enthusiasms Edwin found it more impressive than any scene that he remembered: more inspiring, though less vast in its perspective, than the dreamy plain of the Severn's upper waters that he had seen so

many times from Uffdown. For these hills were very mountains, and mightier in that they rose sheer from a plain that had been bathed in water within the memory of man. And, more than all this . . . far more . . . they were the home of his fathers.

'Now that we are in Somerset we should drink the wine of the country.'

They pushed their bicycles on to the platform before the inn door, and Mr Ingleby called for cider, a pale, dry liquid with a faint acridity very different from the sugary stuff that comes to the cities in bottles from Devonshire.

'Yes, it's good cider,' said Mr Ingleby, tasting. 'Where does it come from?' he asked the landlord, who brought it.

'It do be a tidy drop o' zidur,' said the man. 'It do come from Mr Atwell's varm into Burrowdown.'

'In' with the accusative, thought Edwin.

'Is old Aaron Atwell still living?' asked his father.

The landlord laughed. The gentleman must have been away a long time from these parts. Mr Atwell had been dead these fifteen years.

'The cider's the same,' said Mr Ingleby.

''Tis a marvellous archard, sure 'nuff,' said the landlord. 'And last year was a wunnerful year for apples. 'Tis all accardin' . . .'

They left him, and coasted gently down the hill. Descending, it seemed to Edwin that the dome of Axdown lost some of its mountainous quality; and by the time that they had reached the level of the plain in which Wringford lay, he was hardly conscious of its imminence more than as a reminder that this soft, green country was not wholly devoted to quietude and sleep, but that a

cool and lively air must always be rolling from the hidden slopes. They came to a green, bordered by elms in heavy leaf, on which a solitary donkey and a flock of geese were grazing. Now the road was dead level and the hedges rich with fragile dog-rose petals and thickets of hemp-agrimony that were not yet in flower. Superficially, the road might have been part of Warwickshire; but there was nothing of the Midlands in the air that moved above it.

'Take the next turn to the right,' shouted Mr Ingleby to Edwin, riding ahead.

In the middle of a village drenched with the perfume of roses, Edwin turned to the right down a narrow lane. By this time his father had reached his level. 'Here we are,' he said. They dismounted.

It was a small cottage with a green-painted porch and a carefully tended garden in front of it. The place was built of the stone of the country and washed with the pinkish lime of the hills. In the garden roses and bright annuals were blooming, and a huge acacia, hung with ivory blossom, shadowed the garden gate. On the gate itself Edwin read a crudely painted name: Geranium Cottage. Mr Ingleby smiled. 'Your Uncle Will is very fond of geraniums.' They opened the gate and pushed in their bicycles. Everything in the garden was so meticulously orderly that to wheel them over the mown grass seemed sacrilegious. The porch, at which they waited, was full of choice geraniums. Their hot scent filled the air. Mr Ingleby knocked gently with a polished brass knocker. Slow steps were heard within moving over a flagged floor. The door was opened, disclosing a stone passage that smelt of coolness and cleanliness. It was like the

smell of a sweet dairy. An elderly woman, with a plump and placid face and grey hair, received them. All her figure except her black sateen bodice was covered with a coarse but snowy apron.

'Why, John,' she said. 'It do be a treat to see you.'

She took Mr Ingleby in her arms and kissed him. 'Poor fellow, too,' she said. The embrace implied more than any of the condolences that Edwin had heard in Halesby.

'And this is Edwin,' she said. 'Well, what a great big man, to be sure!' She proceeded to embrace Edwin, and he became conscious of the extraordinary softness and coolness of her face.

'Come in and make yourselves comfortable,' said Aunt Sarah Jane. 'We're used to bicycles in this house. Our Joe has one. He goes to work on it every day, and sometimes on a Sunday rides over to Clevedern on it. Come in, John.' Edwin followed his father into the living-room. It was clean, strikingly clean, and curiously homely. On the walls hung a picture of Queen Victoria, looking like a pouter pigeon in her jubilee robes, and another of the sardonic Disraeli. There were several padded photograph albums with gilt clasps, and other photographs decorated the mantelpiece and a side table. These were all accommodated in fretwork frames.

'Joe do keep us supplied with up-to-date photograph frames,' said Aunt Sarah Jane, following Edwin's glances with a touch of motherly pride. 'He's like his father. Clever with his fingers.'

Edwin found that the photographs were familiar. His father was there . an ardent, younger father, with black whiskers and a determined mouth. A father confident in the virtue of self-help. His

mother, too, in a tight-fitting costume of the eighties, with a row of buttons down the front from the throat to the hem. And, wonder of wonders, there was Edwin himself in a sailor suit. The discovery of his own portrait did something to destroy the illusion of unreality that occupied the place. Obviously he really belonged to it. For years, without his knowing it, his image had been part of this unfamiliar room. Even though he had not known of their existence he had evidently been a familiar accepted person to these people. Even their friends must have known him by sight. It was strange. It was pathetic. 'I can see a touch of our Joe in him, John,' said his aunt, who had been examining him closely. 'An' there do be a look of your father as well.'

'Do you think so?' said Mr Ingleby.

'Joe's a great boy, too,' said Aunt Sarah Jane lovingly.

It was clear enough who was the idol of this household.

'There now, your dinner will be spoiling. Take the boy upstairs, John.'

She left them, and Edwin followed his father up a crooked stair to a low room above the garden. A cool wind was blowing down from Axdown, and the filagree shadow of the lace window-curtains danced on the white coverlet of the bed. The room smelt faintly of lavender. It seemed to Edwin a wonderful room, 'full of sweet'—he couldn't remember the line—'peace and health and quiet breathing.' There was nothing quite so placid as this in the life that he had known.

They washed their dusty faces and came downstairs again, and Edwin, seated by the sunny window of the front room, relapsed into a state

of perfect drowsiness, content merely to exist and drink in the sweet and simple atmosphere of humble content. This, he supposed, was what his father by his struggles and sacrifices had lost Was it worth while? The complications of this question were far too great for Edwin to decide.

The men folk of Geranium Cottage did not return to dinner, and after that meal, in which suet dumplings played an important part, Edwin retired to a trellised structure at the back of the garden, bowery with honeysuckle, that Aunt Sarah Jane described as the harbour. Here, drugged with more cider and fresh air, he dozed away the early afternoon. He was asleep when his father came to call him for tea. After all, it was not surprising that he was sleepy, for they had talked into the small hours the night before. Certainly Aunt Sarah Jane's tea was worth waking up for. Quince marmalade and clotted cream, and wheaten scones that she had baked that morning. Edwin, ready now for any further revelations, would not now have been shocked to hear that in her young days she had been a cook. In this beatific state of refreshment he was anxious to explore.

'When are we going to Highberrow, father?'

'And this was to be a restful holiday,' Mr Ingleby laughed. 'Why, now, if you like.'

Edwin would have run to the linhay behind the house for the bicycles, but his father called him back. The hill was so steep, he told him, that it would be easier for them to walk.

'Well, John, Will.'ll be tarrable disappointed if you aren't here when he comes home from work,' said Aunt Sarah Jane. 'This young man of yours do go too fast for me.'

'Oh, we won't be long,' said Mr Ingleby.

And so they set off together for Highberrow, making, first of all, a straight line for the base of the hills and then following a green lane that skirted the foot of them but was so overshadowed with hazel that the slopes could not be seen. In a mile or so they cut into the main road again, by an iron milestone that said 'Bridgwater 18 : Bristol 14.' The road climbed along a quarried terrace in the hill-side, and to the left of it lay a deep valley, on the farther slope of which lay half a dozen pink-washed cottages with gardens falling to the bed of an attenuated stream; and behind the cottages a steep hill-side rose abruptly to a bare height crowned with ancient earthworks.

'That,' said Mr Ingleby, 'is Silbury camp. There's an old rhyme about it. It is supposed to be full of buried gold. When I was a boy I often used to lie up there in the sun, gazing out over the channel. In spring all the meadows between the camp and Highberrow Batch are full of daffodils. I often used to wish there were daffodils in Halesby. . . .'

In a little while they came to the church of Highberrow, placed like a watch-tower on the edge of the Batch, surveying the immense relics of paganism on the opposite side of the valley. It was a humble and not very beautiful building; but Edwin entered the churchyard with awe, for it seemed to him that so much of the past that had made him lay buried there. And the inscriptions on the tombstones reinforced this idea; for the churchyard was veritably crowded with the remains of dead Inglebys. It made the past, a piece of knowledge so recent to him that it still held an atmosphere of unreality and phantasy,

so ponderable, that in comparison with it his present condition seemed almost unreal. His father led him through the long grass, starry with yellow ragwort, to the corner in which his grandmother was buried.

'This is the place that I told you about,' he said.

'The place where my grandfather went out at night and blasted the rock?'

'Yes.'

It was incredible. Until that moment the story had been only a legend. Edwin wondered how ever his father could have broken away from the tradition of centuries and left the hills. The roots of their family had pierced so deeply into the soil, yes, even beneath the soil and into the veins of the solid rock. The conditions of his own life seemed to him the tokens of an unnatural and artificial thing.

They left the churchyard by a narrow lane that always climbed. They passed the village inn: a long, windswept building, so bare and so exposed to weather that even the tenure of the lichen on the tiles seemed precarious. Over the lintel a weathered board showed them the name of Ingleby in faded letters. Edwin pointed to it.

'Yes,' said his father. 'I suppose he is some remote cousin of yours. Everybody that is left in this village must be related to us in some degree; though I don't suppose any of them would remember me. You see, I went to Axcombe when I was a good deal younger than you.' He smiled. 'I am like a ghost returning to its old home. Like a ghost. . . .'

And yet, to Edwin, the whole place seemed familiar. He was not in the least surprised when,

opposite a windy farm-house, in front of which the dry blades of a dishevelled dracæna shivered as though protesting against its wintry exile, his father turned off to the left along a road that had once been gay with cottage gardens and trim buildings of stone, but was now suggestive of nothing but ruin and desolation. By one of these pathetic ruins his father paused.

'This was your grandfather's house, Eddie. It was here that I was born.'

Now there remained only the ground-plan of a house, and the only sign of habitation in all the ruin was to be seen in the smoke-blackened stones of the chimney. The garden, indeed, lay beautiful in decay, for there, as everywhere in this deserted countryside, the golden ragwort had taken possession; but within the walls of the house only nettles shivered.

'You'll always find nettles in deserted human habitations. I don't know why,' said Mr Ingleby. 'There is a rather unusual botanical curiosity to be found among the workings at Cold Harbour,' he went on, 'the Roman Nettle. Urtica . . . Urtica. . . . My memory isn't what it used to be. It has a bigger leaf than the ordinary nettle and a much more poisonous sting. It's only found in places where the Romans have been.'

Why, in the face of this harrowing desolation, should he be thinking of things like that? A ghost . . . with as little passion or feeling as a ghost: emotions so different from the passionate resentment that now filled Edwin's heart.

'Ah . . . here is the school. I suppose they couldn't pull that down. I remember when it was newly built. It was there that I learnt my alphabet. . . .'

In the whole of the lane the school was the only whole building.

'If you come to the edge of the Batch you will see the valley bottom where I spent my childhood with your great-grandmother.'

They passed on, and saw, a hundred feet beneath them, the valley of the little stream. More ruins, many of them; but one or two cottages still inhabited. The lower cottages lay close to the water, and in four or five places the stream was spanned by a clapper bridge. In one of the gardens ghostly children were playing, and in another ghostly washing flapped in a breeze that had risen with the coolness of evening. Mr Ingleby pointed out to Edwin his great-grandmother's home. It was the cottage in the garden of which the children were playing.

From the chimney a trail of smoke dwindled up against the grey hill-side.

'I should like to see inside it,' said Edwin.

'Would you? No . . . I don't think it would be worth going down into the hollow to see it. You'd only be disappointed. I don't expect there'd be anything much to see. Besides, we haven't time. I want to take you to a little farm —it isn't really big enough to be called a farm— at the top of the lane under Axdown. They call it the Holloway. Why I can't imagine, for it is the highest point of the whole village. Your aunt tells me that your grandfather's sister, your own great-aunt Lydia, is still living there, and I think I had better go and see her.'

He turned again, and Edwin followed him. It seemed strange to him that his father should not be anxious to look inside the house where his

childhood had been spent. A ghost . . . a ghost. . . .

They passed the windy farm once more. A man, in muddy gaiters, was driving cows into the yard. He was the first creature—apart from the ghostly children in the valley—that they had seen. A tall man, with a gaunt, grey face, who did not even turn to look at them or give them good-evening, although they must surely have been the only living people that he had seen that day. It was impossible to believe from the sight of its exterior that the farm was now inhabited.

'Who do you think he is?' Edwin asked.

'I don't know. I haven't the least idea. The people at that farm used to be named Ingleby; and he certainly has the figure of your grandfather. . . .'

'Won't you stop and speak to him?'

'Why should we?'

'But he would be awfully pleased to see you and know who you are. . . .'

'I don't expect he would.'

A moment later Mr Ingleby said,—

'Now, the ruins of this cottage ought to interest you, Edwin.'

'Why? Is it one of ours?'

'No, but the old woman who lived in it in my day was always supposed to be a witch. Mendip people were always great believers in witchcraft. I shouldn't wonder if your aunt believes in 'ill-wishing' to this day. I suppose she was really a harmless old body. The story was that a daughter of hers, with whom she had quarrelled, married a small dairy farmer down by Axcombe, and no sooner had she gone to live with him than the poor man's cows went dry. His business failed.

He had to sell his stock. He was ruined, and took to drink; and in all the public-houses for miles round he used to rail against his mother-in-law, and say that she was responsible for the whole business. She was a lonely old creature, very poor and dirty, and when we were children and going up to the Holloway we used to cover our eyes and run for fear we should catch sight of her. No one even knew when she died. They found her, I heard, when she had been dead for a week or ten days.'

Edwin shivered. These hill-people, it seemed, were hard and cruel. No doubt he must have some of their stony cruelty in his own being somewhere.

At last they reached the farm at the top of the Holloway. It was a poor building, only a little more hospitable than the ruins in the valley. Mr Ingleby knocked at the door, and a sturdy, middle-aged man with an iron hook in place of his right hand lifted the latch and stared at them.

'You don't know me, Isaac?' said Mr Ingleby.

'Noa. . . . I can't say I do know 'ee.'

'I'm John Ingleby.'

'John Ingleby! . . . Well, and I'm proud to see 'ee, John. Do 'ee step inside and see mother. I can't shake hands with 'ee the way I was used to. I lost en in a mowin'-machine five years back. Come in then.'

He led the way into a dark cabin. Everything in it was dark, partly, perhaps, because the windows were full of flower-pots; partly because all the furniture was darkened with age or smoke or grime. The only bright colours in its brownness were a number of shining copper utensils and a fine show of geraniums in the window. Isaac followed Mr Ingleby's eyes towards these flowers.

'Purty, ban't they?' he said with pride. 'Your brother Will sent mother they.'

In the gloom of the fireplace, where a pile of turves smouldered, mother began to dissociate herself from the surrounding brownness. She was a very old woman. Edwin had never seen any one so old—sitting bolt upright in a straight-backed oaken chair. Her face seemed to Edwin very beautiful, for extreme age had taken from it all the extraneous charm that smoothness and colour give, leaving only the sheer chiselled beauty of feature. It was a noble face, finely modelled, with a straight nose, a tender mouth, and level brows beneath which burned the darkest and clearest eyes that Edwin had ever seen. Her hair was white and scanty, but little of it was seen beneath the white bonnet that she wore. Edwin felt her eyes go through him in the gloom.

'Here's cousin John come to see 'ee, mother,' said Isaac, bending over her.

'John? What John?' said the old lady.

It struck Edwin at once that her speech was purer and more delicate than that of her son.

'John Ingleby, Aunt Lydia,' said Edwin's father.

'You need not raise your voice, my dear,' she said. 'My sight and my hearing are wonderful, thank God.'

'Then you remember me, Aunt Lydia?'

'Of course I remember you, John. Though it's many and many years since my eyes saw you. And how are you, my dear? They tell me that you have done great things in the world. You're a doctor, like poor Doctor Marshall.'

'No . . . I'm not a doctor. I'm in business. I'm a chemist.'

'I knew it was something of the kind. You

needn't speak so loud. And they told me you had married. I suppose this is your boy. A fine boy, surely. He has a look of your grandfather.'

'Yes, this is Edwin.'

'I don't remember that name in our family. It sounds like a fanciful name. Come here, my dear, and let me look at you.'

Edwin went to her, and she kissed him. Her face was so cold and smooth that she might almost have been dead.

'And how is your dear wife, John?'

'I've had a terrible blow, Aunt Lydia. I've lost her.'

'Ah . . . that was bad for you, and bad for the boy, too.'

'I shall never get over it.' Mr Ingleby's voice trembled.

'Yes, of course, you say that. It's natural that you should. You're young. But when you live to be as old as I am you'll know better. You will get over it. When a few years have gone by you'll marry again.'

'Never, Aunt Lydia . . . never. . . .'

'Yes. . . . That's what you feel now. But I know the family. The Inglebys are always very tender in marriage. I've seen many of them that have lost their wives, and they always marry again. I don't suppose that I shall live to hear of it; but when the time comes you'll remember what I said.'

'No, Aunt Lydia. . . . never.'

'Time is a wonderful thing, John. I'm glad to have seen you and your boy. I hope he'll take after you—you were always the best of them.'

She gave a little sigh. Evidently she was tired. The flame that burned behind her black eyes was

so very feeble for all its brightness. Isaac, who had been watching her with the devotion of a practised nurse, saw that she could not stand any more talking.

'Now, mother, that's enough, my dear,' he said.

'Kiss me, John,' she said. And Mr Ingleby kissed her.

'Well, now that you be here after all these years,' said Isaac cheerily, as he rearranged the red shawl round his mother's shoulders, 'you won't leave us without taking something. There do be a lovely bit of bacon I have cut. Do 'ee try a bit now, and a mug of cider.'

Edwin, who was already hungry with his walk, and was rapidly acquiring a taste for the wine of the country, now became aware of the fact that the dark ceiling was decked with sides of bacon and hams that hung there slowly pickling in the turf smoke that saturated the atmosphere of the room. He was disappointed when his father declined to take any of this delicacy.

'Well, a mug of cider, then,' Isaac persisted. He went into an inner chamber down three stone steps, with three china mugs hanging on his hook. 'You see, I do be pretty handy with 'en,' he laughed.

They drank their cider solemnly. It was even drier than that which they had drunk for lunch at Wringford, and so free from acidity that all that Edwin could taste was that faint astringent bitterness. It had also a bouquet that was less like the odour of apples than that of a flour-mill. A wonderful drink. . . . They said good-bye, and Isaac, who seemed to Edwin the most kindly and patient creature he had ever met, showed them to the door.

By this time the sun was setting, and the cool wind from the west had freshened. Edwin saw, for the first time, the huge panorama on which they had turned their backs as they climbed the hill to the Holloway. Perhaps it was the strangeness of all his recent experience; perhaps, partly, the exhilaration that proceeded from Isaac's cider, but the sight struck Edwin as one of greater magnificence than any he had ever seen before. From their feet the whole country sloped in a series of hilly waves to the shores of the channel, and that muddy sea now shone from coast to coast in a blaze of tawny light: now truly, for the first time, one of the gateways of the world. And beyond the channel stood the heaped mountains of Wales, very wild and black in their vastness. The sight was so impressive that on their way down the lane they did not speak.

At last Edwin said,—

'I think Aunt Lydia has a very beautiful face. She looks like some old grand lady.'

'She is very like your grandfather,' said his father. 'She must be over ninety. It is a great age.'

And on the way home Edwin began to imagine what his strange grandfather the dowser must have been, with the figure of the lonely farmer, his black beard and hair, and his great-aunt Lydia's noble features and piercing eyes.

II

They stayed for a week at Geranium Cottage, sinking without any effort into its placid life. Edwin was content merely to live there, soaking up the atmosphere of Wringford village, and only

thinking of Highberrow as a strange and ghostly adventure, possible, but too disturbing to be indulged in. The tiredness of Mr Ingleby, who never showed the least inclination to revisit the place, made this abstention easier. In the whole of his week at Wringford Edwin only made one attempt to see Highberrow again. The impulse came to him very early one morning, just at the hour of dawn when the birds had fallen to silence, and Joe, who happened to be working for his master at a village some miles away, was splashing about under the pump in the yard at the back of the linhay. Mr Ingleby was still asleep, and Edwin, dressing quietly, stole downstairs and set off towards the hills, this time on his bicycle.

He followed the high road, and left the machine in a quarry opposite the point where the first pink-washed cottages appeared. By this time he was almost sorry that he had come there: for he was quite certain that the village he was now going to visit would be a very different place from the dead or hallucinated Highberrow that he and his father had penetrated some days before. He felt this so strongly that he wouldn't take the risk of spoiling that marvellous impression, and instead of following the road that they had taken before, he changed his mind, crossed the valley of the pink cottages, and climbed the shaley slope of Silbury. In the fosse that surrounded the encampment a hundred white tails bobbed at once, and, laughing, he scrambled up the sides of what had once been Silbury Camp, and now was Silbury Warren.

Here, lying full length upon the top of the vallum, as perhaps a Belgic ancestor, or an ancestor who held the crest before the Belgæ came, had

lain before him, he could look over the combe towards the church of Highberrow on the Batch. And the church tower was all he saw of Highberrow again: a feature most unrepresentative of the spirit of that pagan place. Even the church tower at this hour of the morning could scarcely be seen for mist, and all the time cold mist was pouring down in a dense, impalpable stream from the milky coverlet that spread upon Axdown and Callow and all the hills beyond. In the plain nothing could be seen at first; and from the sleeping villages no mist-muffled sound was heard; but by degrees the pattern of the plain's surface, with its dappled orchards, its green pasturage and paler turf-moors, cut by the straight bands of the rhines, the sluggish channels through which the surface water drained into the sea, became more clear, and with this the sounds of the country grew more distinct: indefinite noises, such as the creaking of cart-wheels in a hidden lane, the squeak of a pump-handle at the back of the pink cottages, the clink of a pick in the quarry. The whole world awoke, and Edwin, too, found that he was awake and awfully hungry. He scrambled down the slope. Smoke was now rising from the chimneys of the cottages in the combe. He was back at Wringford in time for breakfast.

By this time he had begun to feel quite at home in Geranium Cottage. He had made the discovery of his cousin and his Uncle Will. The latter he found wholly lovable: a creature of slow, quiet speech, as leisurely and peaceful as his vocation, and full of small kindnesses that surprised by reason of their unexpectedness.

The thing that most impressed Edwin in his uncle's nature was the extraordinary tenderness he

showed towards the green things that were his care. Perhaps the west-country custom of dispensing with the neuter pronoun and speaking of all inanimate creatures as if they were persons, made his solicitude for their welfare more noticeable. But he was not only kind to them in his speech: his short and clumsy-looking fingers, that seemed to be built for nothing but the roughest of labour, became amazingly sensitive and delicate as soon as he began to handle the plants in his garden, so that every touch had in it the nature of a caress.

In this life, of the devoted husbandman, he was evidently wholly contented; and he made it seem to Edwin the most natural and human on earth. The fascination of watching his uncle's hands grew upon him, and in the end he would watch the man, who had been busy at the same work in his master's garden all day, tending his own favourites at home until the light began to fail, and Aunt Sarah Jane would call the two of them in to supper. The spectacle had a sort of hypnotic effect upon the boy, it was so slow and measured, as slow almost, Edwin thought, as the processes of germination and growth which it was his uncle's vocation to assist. His fingers even handled the purple soil as if he loved it.

His cousin was a different matter altogether: a tall, dark-haired boy, a couple of years older than Edwin. He had, much more distinctly than Uncle Will, the Ingleby face, the features that were to be seen at their best in the old lady at the Holloway farm. And he possessed in a high degree the quality that had carried Edwin's father out into the world: a seriousness that made him anxious to 'get on,' promptings of which were

now being satisfied in an accumulation of the periodical publications that have taken the place of Mr Samuel Smiles in these days: weeklies devoted to all kinds of useful hobbies—electricity, wood-carving, plumbing—the series that eventually culminated in the gigantic illusion of the Self-Educator.

To these short cuts to power the young man devoted all his evenings, and though he was quite natural in his anxiousness to be friendly with Edwin, with whose subtler and more contemplative nature he had at present so little in common, the attempts were not very successful. Between these two there lay a far more obvious gulf than that which separated Edwin from the older people. In a way, he could not help admiring his cousin's earnestness, probably because he knew that he could never imitate it, and yet he sometimes found himself examining it in a mood of absolute detachment that made his sympathy feel artificial.

Just before he left St Luke's he had been reading Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and in the light of this work the efforts of his father, followed by those of his cousin Joe, seemed to him an excellent instance of the tendency of ancient stocks to vary or sport in definite directions. In the earnest Joe Edwin found the phenomenon a little troublesome, for the sight of the immense energies that the youth was putting into channels that were futile distressed him, and the more so because to correct the waste it would have been necessary to begin again from a point so distant that Joe would be faced with the spectacle of more than half of his present energies wasted. So Edwin thought as little as the consciousness of his own selfishness would allow him, of all the labours that were typified

by the fretwork mahogany frames that surrounded the photographs of the Halesby Inglebys, listening instead to the endless tales of his Aunt Sarah Jane, in the hour when she became talkative, after supper.

By this time Edwin was so interested in his own romantic origins that any story of the old Highberrow would do for him; and his aunt, with her soft Somerset voice, her picturesque phrasing, and her unfailing memory for social details, rebuilt, night after night, the life of the decayed village as it had been in the old dowser's time, evolving by degrees a human comedy which resembled that of its great exemplar by the way in which the protagonists of one episode became mere incidentals to another. Edwin knew them all by name, and recognised them as if he had met them in the flesh whenever he heard of them.

In this way, sitting in the smell of the window geraniums over a leisurely supper of bread and cheese, in his uncle's case literally washed down with cider, he heard a story that he always remembered with pride and pity and a degree of passionate resentment: the story of how the village of his fathers had sunk into decay.

Highberrow, it appeared, had been built on what was then a common moorland, by the men who lived in it, laboriously, stone by stone. Their right to these fruits of their labour had never been called into question, and the whole spirit of the village had been happy and prosperous, as well it might, seeing that it owed nothing to the care of any outsider and could pay its way. And during those prosperous times its liberties seemed secure from danger. But when the decay of the grouvier's industry led to unemployment and poverty, and

the younger men of the Highberrow families began to look for their living overseas, the little community became so weak that the owner of the manor-house saw his opportunity. As Lord of the Manor he disputed the 'squatters' right' of the Highberrow villagers, and through his agents demanded a rent that would have made living impossible for most of them, for the cottages that they or their forefathers had built. If they refused to pay the rent, he said, they would be evicted, not in order that other people might be introduced who would pay, but merely to satisfy the landlord's convictions of the rightness of his principle. That was the way in which he put it. Merely out of spite would be a more accurate description of his motives.

Highberrow was in a bad way. The villagers were either very old or very young, and in either case their feebleness made the whole organism unfit to resist the inroads of the parasite. What is more, they were very poor, and the very nature of the Mendip mining industry had made them so far individualist that the idea of combined resistance did not occur to them. The landlord wisely started his operations with an old woman whose cottage lay nearest to the woods in which his pheasants were bred. Almost incredibly poor, she had lived on the products of her garden and her poultry. To pay rent was out of the question. Sheer age and inertia made it impossible for her to move, and in the course of time she was evicted with her miserable belongings, and went to die at the home of a married daughter.

Emerging from this easy contest, the landlord, or perhaps his agent, moved on to the next. It was unfortunate for him, and fortunate for the

villagers, that he now pitched on the cottage of Thomas Ingleby, the dowser, Edwin's grandfather. The old man had this in his favour : that he was a man of two trades, that even when the mining had failed him he could make a living with the divining rod, and the consciousness of this power no doubt stiffened his resistance. Another eviction was decreed, but this time things did not go so easily. When the landlord's men arrived from the manor to empty the house, another party appeared from the Cold Harbour mines, and as soon as the furniture was dragged out at the front door it was seized and taken in again at the back.

'It were a proper field-day,' said Uncle Will quietly, 'I do remember it well. I can see your father now, John, standing over beyond the road with his back to the wall, not speakin' a word, just smokin' of his pipe.'

The landlord's men saw that this sort of thing might go on for ever and none the better for it, so they just gave it up, but old Ingleby (Edwin had already canonised him as a 'village Hampden') had shown the rest of the Highberrow people what could be done, and gradually stirred them into combined action.

It was a little, pitiful attempt. He himself put into it all his savings, a matter of a few pounds, and to this were added as many shillings as could be scraped together in the village. He took the money to a lawyer in Axcombe—Bayliss was his name—an honest man with a sense of justice and, one suspects, some admiration for the sturdiness of his client. Bayliss worked the matter up and made a case of it, and no further attempts at eviction were made in Highberrow in the meantime. The village even regained a little of its

former confidence, and for some time the landlord did not show his face in it. But once more luck was against Highberrow. Bayliss, the good lawyer, died. He had been careful to keep the matter in his own hands, and when it came to be considered by his successor, a partner with social ambitions, the new man would not touch it: partly because there appeared to be no more money in it (as was probably the case), and partly because he was in the habit of meeting the Lord of the Manor in the hunting-field, and was on card-playing terms with the agent.

There followed an exodus of despair. The people of Highberrow, who had no more money to fight with, packed up their pitiable belongings and left their houses rather than face the trouble of eviction. Not so Thomas Ingleby. The agent returned to the attack. There were threats: a stormy interview, in which the dowser faced the landlord himself. A final week's notice was given, and Ingleby made sure once more of the support of his friends from the neighbouring villages. But no further attempt at eviction was made. At the last moment the landlord climbed down. He arranged another interview, and at this the terms for the whole village were settled. For the lives of the present occupants, or for a period of sixty years, the cottages should remain rent-free. It was not everything, but 'twas a famous victory. 'That is why Aunt Lydia do be still living up to the Holloway to this day,' said Aunt Sarah Jane.

'And I suppose grandfather lived there till he died,' said Edwin.

'No, the poor dear. When he did grow very aged your uncle and I went up to Highberrow and persuaded en that he weren't fit to look after

himself. You should 'a seed the dirt in that house! And he comed down to live along of we. But he were never happy, were he, Will?'

'Noa . . . he were never happy.'

'He were a quare old man. Us seed very little of en. Arften people would come for en from a distance that wanted water found, and he did spend the day roving the country cutting blackthorns for his dowsing. Right up to the day when he took to his bed, poor soul.'

'I should like to have seen him dowsing,' said Edwin. 'I haven't even seen the twigs that they use.'

'Why, that would have been easy enough. Only the other day I throwed out a lot that belonged to your grandfather.'

Edwin blushed at this sacrilege. 'And could Uncle Will find water with a twig?' he asked.

'Not I,' laughed his uncle. 'But they do say it runs in families. Have you ever tried, John?'

'I tried when I was a boy,' said Mr Ingleby, 'but nothing happened.'

'I expect our Joe could,' said Aunt Sarah Jane, with infinite faith in her offspring.

'No, mother, I've a' tried it,' said Joe, from the lamplit corner where he was wrestling with the science of sanitary inspection.

'I wonder if I could. . . .' said Edwin.

'Well, you shall have a try,' laughed his uncle.

'At this time o' night?' said Aunt Sarah Jane, scandalised.

'Let the boy have a try,' said Uncle Will, rising. ''Tis a beautivul moonlight night, and I'll take him over the field where the new water-pipe runs.'

'You'm mad, the two of you,' said his aunt with a sigh.

Edwin and his uncle went out into the garden, and there the boy watched the gardener's clumsy, skilful hands cut a forked twig from a blackthorn bush.

'Hazel do work as well,' he said, 'but father always used the thorn.'

Then they went out together over a dewy meadow, and his uncle showed him how to hold the rod: with his two hands turned palm upwards, the arms of the twig between the third and fourth fingers, the thumb, and the palm of each hand, and the fork downwards between them. Over the meadow grass they walked slowly, then suddenly the tip of the rod began to turn upwards by no agency of which Edwin was aware. It was very thrilling, for his hands were quite still.

'There you are,' said his uncle, 'you've a found our water-pipe.'

'Hold the rod down, uncle,' Edwin said.

He did so, and now the mysterious force was so strong that the arms of the twig snapped.

'Now, you've gone and broke it,' said Uncle Will. 'Come in or you'll catch cold.'

They went in together.

'Well . . .?' said Mr Ingleby.

'Oh, he's a proper dowser, sure enough,' said Uncle Will.

Edwin was still curiously thrilled with the whole business. He felt that a little more excitement in his attainment was due to him; but no one, not even his father, seemed in the least impressed. It comforted him to think that his cousin Joe, his eyes fixed on his book in the corner, had really less in common than himself with the strange dark people from whom they were both descended. It was better, he thought, to be a born dowser

than a Fellow of Balliol. More wonderful still to be both.

All the rest of that evening he felt a queer elation in his mysterious birthright, and when his father yawned and they both went up to bed he lay awake for a long time listening to the drowsy music of the corncrake and the wail of hunting owls, trying to put himself more closely in touch with the romantic past that had bred him: with that magnificent figure his grandfather, and the innumerable strange and passionate ancestry that slept under the shadow of Highberrow church on the Batch. 'Yea, I have a goodly heritage,' he thought. And so he came to think of his father, through whom these things came to him: of his hard achievements, of his loneliness, of his difficulty of expressing—if it were not a disinclination to express—all the powerful and stormy things that must lie hidden in his heart. And a feeling of passionate kinship carried Edwin away: an anxiety to show his love for his father in unmistakable ways; to make clear to him once and for all the depth of his son's devotion. He began to think of his father as a mother might think of her child. It must have been in that way, he imagined, that his own mother had thought of her husband. The night was so still that he imagined he could hear the rusty ivory of the acacia-blossom falling at the gate.

III

They were in the train on their way home from Bristol, passing smoothly under the escarpment of the lower Cotswolds. The fortnight had passed

with an astounding swiftness. After leaving Wringford they had cycled over the back of Mendip, past the mines at Cold Harbour, where they had paused for half an hour to look at the workings, now deserted and overgrown with ragwort and scabious, and the Roman amphitheatre, to the great limestone gorge above Axcombe; and from there they had ridden to Wells, where, beyond streets that flowed eternally with limpid water, they had gazed on the wonder of the cathedral and seen the white swans floating in the palace moat under a sky that was full of peace. Only for a moment had they seen the masts of Bristol and Redcliffe's dreamy spire; and now in a few hours they would be back in Halesby: in another world.

As they travelled northwards Edwin was thinking all the time of the work that he would do in his little room above the bed of stocks. It should be a fragrant room, he thought, and a good one for reading, for when his attention wandered he would be able to lift his eyes to a line of gentler hills crowned by the dark folds of Shenstone's hanging woods. And there he would be able to dream of the coloured past and of his own exciting future, and the enchanted life that he would soon be leading among the noblest works of men in letters and in stone. Oxford, his Mecca . . . the eternal city of his dreams. He allowed his fancy to travel westward over the rolling Cotswold and droop by the slow descent of river valleys to that sacred place. His father's voice dispelled his dream. They were alone in the carriage and their privacy made speaking easy.

'Edwin . . . I've been thinking a good deal about your future.'

'Yes, father?'

'I've been thinking it over in my own mind. I talked it over a week or two ago with your Uncle Albert. He's a sound man of business, you know. Then I felt that I couldn't trust my judgment: the whole world was upside down; but now I feel that I can think clearly, and of course I am anxious to do my best for you. I've been thinking about this Oxford plan. . . .'

'Yes.'

'You know quite well, Edwin, that I'm not a rich man. I'm a very poor man. You can understand that better than you could before, after this holiday. And when people have very limited means and are getting on in life—this business has made me an old man, you know—they have to be very careful in their decisions. Looking at it from every point of view, I don't think it would be fair of me to let you go to Oxford.'

'Father . . . what do you mean?'

'To begin with, there's the expense.'

'But I shall get a scholarship. I'll work like anything. I'll make sure of it.'

'I'm sure you would. You're a good boy. But that isn't everything by a long way. When you've got your scholarship, supposing you do get it, the expense would begin. I shouldn't like you to feel at a hopeless disadvantage with men of your own year. You would have to live quite a different life from them. You wouldn't be able to afford any of their pleasures.'

'I shouldn't want their pleasures.'

'That is a rash thing to say. But I'm looking even farther ahead. What can you expect to do when you've taken a degree in Arts?'

'A fellowship. . . .'

'Ah, but that is a matter of considerable uncertainty. I've seen so many men who have managed to scrape through a university degree and then been thrown on the world in a state of miserable poverty. Look at Mr Kelly at the grammar-school. You wouldn't like to live his life; but I believe he has quite a brilliant university career behind him. No . . . I don't think it would be fair to you.'

'But mother and I always said . . .'

'Yes, I know . . . you were a pair of dreamers, both of you. If you felt any very strong desire to become a parson there might be something in it, though that, too, is a miserable life often enough. But you don't, do you?'

'No . . . of course not.'

'So I think that while I am living you should have the chance of learning a useful profession. What about doctoring?'

'But that would be expensive too.'

'I know that . . . but I think we could do it. We should have a little in common. I might even be able to help you. And in a way . . . in a way I should feel that in you I was realising some of my own old ambitions. It is a noble profession, Eddie: the most humane in the world. No one need ever be ashamed of being a doctor. I think that a parson who professes religion for the sake of a living is rather to be despised.'

'Father, I'm sure it would cost too much. Six years, you know. . . .'

'Five . . . only five, if you pass all your examinations. And it need not be so expensive as you think. During the last year they have turned the old College in North Bromwich into a University. They give a degree in medicine.

And while you were studying there you could still live with me at Halesby. I should be glad of your company.'

This appeal to Edwin's pity was difficult to resist. It recalled to him all the resolutions that he had made in the night at Wringford: the devotion with which he had determined to devote himself to his father's welfare: the determination that he should never do anything that could cause the man a moment's pain. It was difficult . . . difficult.

'You could still get your scholarship,' his father went on. 'There are several endowments of that kind at the North Bromwich medical school. I have a pamphlet at home that gives all the particulars. I had even shown it to your mother.'

'And what did she say, father?'

'She didn't say much. She knew it would be a great disappointment to you. But I think she realised that it would be a good thing for you; and I know she looked forward to having you at home.'

'Yes . . . she must have known what a disappointment it would be. Father, I wish you would think it over again.'

'I want you to think it over, too. At present it naturally comes as a shock to you; but I think you'll see in time. . . .'

He couldn't see. He knew that he could never see it in that light. It was going to take all the beauty that he had conceived out of his life. It was going to ruin all his happiness. In place of light and cleanliness and learning it was going to give him . . . what? The darkness of a smoky city; its grime; the mean ideals of the people who lived beneath its ugliness. Even the memory of

the enthusiasm with which he had thought of the life of old Doctor Marshall, his father's patron, couldn't mitigate the dreariness of the prospect. The idea of living for ever in company with dirt and misery and harrowing disease repelled him. It was no good telling him that contact with these misfortunes developed the nobler faculties of man. It was not the life that he had wanted. His soul sent forth a cry of exceeding bitterness. And while he sat there, full of misery and resentment, the train was carrying them onward into the gloom that always overshadowed the City of Iron.

BOOK II

. . . so that with much ado I was corrupted, and made to learn the dirty devices of the world.

THOMAS TRAHERNE.

CHAPTER I

THE CITY OF IRON

I

The city of iron stands upon three hills and its valleys were once watered by two rivers; but since the day when its name was humbly written in Doomsday these pastoral features have disappeared, so that the hills are only known as tramway gradients that testify to the excellence of the Corporation's power station, and the rivers, running in brick culverts, have been deprived not only of their liberty but even of their natural function of receiving a portion of the city's gigantic sewage. The original market of North Bromwich has been not so much debauched from without, in the manner of other growing towns, as organised from within by the development of its own inherent powers for evil. It is not a place from which men have wilfully cast out beauty so much as one from which beauty has vanished in spite of man's pitiful aspirations to preserve it. Indeed, its citizens are objects rather for pity than for reproach, and would be astonished to receive either, for many of them are wealthy, and from their childhood, knowing no better, have believed that wealth is a justification and an apology for every mortal evil from ugliness to original sin.

In the heart of the city the sense of power, impressive if malignant, is so overwhelming that one cannot see the monstrosity as a whole and can almost understand the blindness of its inhabitants.

Go, rather, to the hills beyond Halesby, to Uffdown and Pen Beacon, where, with a choice of prospects, one may turn from the dreamy plain of Severn and the cloudy splendours of Silurian hills, to its pillars of cloud by day and its pillars of fire by night; and perhaps in that remoter air you may realise the city's true significance as a phenomenon of unconquered if not inevitable disease. If you are a physician, you will realise that this evil has its counterpart in human tissues, where a single cell, that differs not at all from other cells and is a natural unit in the organism, may suddenly and, as it seems, unreasonably acquire a faculty of monstrous and malignant growth, cleaving and multiplying to the destruction of its fellows—a cell gone mad, to which the ancients gave the name of cancer.

The inhabitants of North Bromwich, who are a tolerant people, and proud of the fact, would smile at this reflection. They are not in the habit of surveying the midden in which they are bred from remote hilltops, except on Bank Holidays, at which time they have discovered a truth from which they might learn more: that with the aid of hill air and exercise, whether it be that of cocoanut shies or swing-boats, or the more hazardous pursuit of donkey-riding, it is possible to absorb a greater quantity of alcohol in a given time without unduly suffering than in the atmosphere of their own streets. But they have not time to learn, and since they have never known any other conditions of living, they exhibit the admirable human characteristic of making the best of their surroundings and persuading themselves that their hallucinated existence is typical of human life. They are even eager, pathetically eager, to find and to proclaim

its virtues, and that they may do this more easily they have invented specious names for the disease and its results: Industry for the first, and, for the second, Progress.

In the vindication of a Municipal Conscience (making the best of a bad job) they periodically extend the area over which their coat of arms, a reminder of days when chivalry existed, is displayed. The coat of arms itself is an unfortunate symbol, for it is supported by the figure of a brawny slave who carries the hammer with which his chains have been forged; but the motto at least is encouraging. It is the word 'Forward,' expressing the aspirations of the citizens towards the day when all England may be as the Black Country. The watcher on Uffdown may give it a more far-sighted significance: 'forward, to the day when there shall be no more coal, and the evil, of its own inanition, perish.'

For the present, at any rate, the city showed no signs of perishing. During the last year or two, its tentacles had spread farther than ever before, swarming into the wet and lonely valley of the Dulas Fechan, a deep cleft in the mountains beyond Felindre where a noisy river ran through undergrowth older than man's memory. From this valley, the council had decreed, the rain of the Savaddan watershed, which geology had destined for the Wye and later for the Atlantic, must now traverse eighty miles or more of conquered territory, and after being defouled by the domestic usages of North Bromwich, must find its way into the Trent, and so to the German Ocean, as the Romans thoughtlessly labelled the North Sea. 'Water,' said the Mayor, who was also known as Sir Joseph Astill, the brewer, 'water is one of the

necessities of life. It is our duty to the public to see that they have it, and that they have it pure and unadulterated.'

So the Welsh water came, and the altruistic baronet took the credit for it. Indeed the progressive spirit of North Bromwich found its incarnation in this fleshy gentleman. It was he who presented the municipal art gallery with their unrivalled collection of Madox-Jones cartoons, to say nothing of three portraits of himself exemplifying (he had an elegant vocabulary) the styles of the three greatest portrait painters of modern times. It was he who saved the art of music from degradation by fighting, with all the weight of his personal influence, against the performance of secular music, music, that is, divorced from 'sacred' words, upon the Sabbath. It was he, again, who aroused public feeling on the question of the university: 'the first Modern university,' he called it.

He accomplished its endowment, equipped it with a principal whose name was a household word in the homes of the great middle classes; and finally set the seal of modernity on his creation, less than twenty years before the total prohibition of alcohol became law in retrograde America, by instituting a learned faculty and providing a degree in the science of . . . brewing. Just as an example of the city's liberality, there was also a faculty of Arts. The faculty of Science, of course, was important, if only as an appendage to the brewing school; those of Engineering and Mining flattered the industries of the district; that of Commerce taught its graduates to write business letters in every spoken tongue and give the Yankees what for; and lastly, that of Medicine, supplied a necessary

antidote to the activities of most of the others.

Sir Joseph Astill was proud, as well he might be, of the Medical School. 'In this city,' he boasted, 'there are actually more hospital beds *per centum* of inhabitants than in any other in the whole country. The North Bromwich medical student has a greater opportunity of studying disease, in all its aspects, than the alumnus of any other school in the world. Thousands of beds lie waiting for his scrutiny; and I am glad to say that very few of them are ever empty.'

Edwin's first serious acquaintance with North Bromwich had begun at the end of the summer holidays, through which he had worked with a good deal less than the fiery enthusiasm that he would have put into his reading for the Balliol scholarship. The syllabus of the examination for the Astill Exhibition had amazed him by its simplicity: the prescribed books were works that he had absorbed some years before at St Luke's, and though the mathematical side of the business worried him, as it had always done, it was clear that in North Bromwich the classics were regarded really as a polite accomplishment rather than as an integral part of a gentleman's equipment in life: so that these drowsy summer months were really a period of comparative idleness in which he had time to brood on his regrets and become gradually reconciled to his new fate. In this spirit he approached the examination. Even the capitoline eminence on which the university buildings were placed, with the tremendous renaissance buildings of the Council House and the Corinthian Town Hall, did not greatly impress him. He saw rather the squalid slums from which these pretentious buildings rose. It was so different, he thought, from Oxford, and

he passed the flagged courtyard with its cool fountain and the benevolent statue of Sir Joseph Astill in a frock coat and carrying a rolled umbrella on which the sculptor had lavished all the feeling of his art, without the least shadow of spiritual obeisance.

With two other long-legged candidates he had worked through his papers in a small room whose windows overlooked the quiet square and a phantom stream of noiseless traffic beyond. The first paper had been mathematical, and its intracacies kept his mind so busy that he had little time for reflection. From time to time he would see one of the long-legged competitors reducing the end of his penholder to wood-pulp in the earnestness of ruminant thought; and occasionally the deep boom of the clock in the tower of the Art Gallery would remind him that time was veritably passing; but time passed swiftly, and he was almost surprised to find himself once more in an air that for all its vitiation was less sleepy than that of the sealed examination room. By the end of the first evening all that he feared in the examination papers was over. To-morrow he would be on his own ground and the modern university could do its damnedest.

Next day the classical papers were distributed and Edwin, who found them easy, could see that his pen-chewing friend was in a bad way. All the passages set for translation were familiar: the grammatical questions consisted of old catches that had been drilled into him by Mr Leeming in the Upper Fourth. As far as he was concerned, it was a walk over.' He had time to take in more of his surroundings and to watch the silent coloured stream of traffic filtering through the narrows

where the bulk of the Town Hall constricted the street. At the end of each day he found his father anxiously awaiting him. He was eager to see and handle the examination papers for himself. He seemed impressed by their difficulty, and Edwin found it hard to reassure him without appearing objectionably superior. He seemed rather surprised that Edwin, on the eve of such a formidable ordeal, should choose to take out his bicycle and ride towards the hills, so surprised that it became a matter for serious debate with Edwin whether he should do as he wanted to do and appear priggish, or affect an anxiety that didn't exist merely to please his father. In the end he decided to be honest at all costs.

The part of the examination that he enjoyed most was the *viva-voce* in Classics. For this trial he was led up many flights of stone steps to a room full of books in which the Dean of the Faculty of Arts awaited him: a kindly, nervous old man with a grey beard, with whom Edwin immediately felt at home. His nervousness seemed to Edwin appropriate: it implied the indubitable fact that in North Bromwich Arts was a sideshow that counted for nothing, and that the professor's dignity, as Dean of a learned Faculty, was a precarious and unsubstantial thing. 'Your papers were excellent, . . . excellent,' he said to begin with. 'Now, I should like you to read me something.' He pointed to a bookshelf. 'Let us start with some Greek.'

'What would you like, sir?'

'Oh, it's not what I should like. What would you like to read? Something that really appeals to you.'

Edwin felt that the dean was watching him, like a cat stalking a bird, as his fingers approached the

bookshelf. It was a curious responsibility, for it would be an awful shame if he chose something that the old man didn't approve of. Sophocles. . . . Why not Sophocles?

He picked out the Antigone, and chose the great chorus :—

Ἔρως ἀνίκατε μάχαν,
Ἔρως, ὃς ἐν κτήμασι πίπτεις, . . .

'Let's have it in Greek first.'

Edwin read it in the level voice which the Head at St Luke's had always used for the recitation of Greek poetry. When he had finished the first strophe he looked up and saw that the Dean's weak eyes, beneath their tortoiseshell spectacles, were brimming with tears.

'That will do,' he said, 'unless you'd prefer to go on . . .'

Edwin read the antistrophe.

'Yes . . . I don't think you need translate it,' said the Dean. He paused for a moment, then, replacing the volume, went on. 'In this university I am known as the Professor of Dead Languages. Dead languages. What?'

They passed a pleasant half-hour together. In Latin Edwin chose Lucretius and a passage from the Georgics, at the end of which the Dean confided to him that he kept bees. 'Thank you, that will do,' he said. 'I gather that you are entering the Medical School. . . . Well, it is a noble profession. I don't know what we should do without doctors, I'm sure.'

Four days later Mr Ingleby received him at the breakfast table with unconcealed emotion. 'You've got your scholarship, Edwin. I'm . . . I'm as pleased as if I'd won it myself. I never had the opportunity of winning a scholarship in my life.'

The hand in which he held the letter trembled. He kissed Edwin fervently. 'This is a great day for me,' he said: and Edwin, glowing, felt that anything was worth while that could give such pleasure to the man that he had determined to love.

III

On a bright morning at the beginning of September Edwin found himself one of a crowd of ten or fifteen youths, waiting with a varying degree of assurance, outside the office of the Dean of the Medical Faculty in James Street, a sordid thoroughfare in which the pretentious buildings of the old College of Science hid its hinder quarters. The door was small, and only distinguished from its neighbours, a steam laundry and brassworker's office, by a plate that bore the inscription, 'University of North Bromwich. Medical School.' Inside the door stood a wooden box for a porter, usually empty, but in its moments of occupation surveying a long, dark cloakroom with a hundred or more numbered lockers and corresponding clothes-hooks, on a few of which undergraduates gowns and battered mortar-boards were hanging. This morning the Dean was holding audience of all the first year men, and each of the crowd in which Edwin now found himself a negligible unit, was waiting until his name should be called from the office, and, in the meantime, surveying his companions with suspicion and being surveyed with a more confident and collective suspicion by seniors who happened to drift through the corridors on business or idleness, and showed evidence of their initiation by familiarity with the porter.

Only one face in the company was in the least familiar to Edwin : that of a ponderous young man with immaculate black hair carefully parted in the middle, who had sat stolidly through the Astill Exhibition examination a few desks away from him. As he did not appear to be anxious to recognise this fact, Edwin abandoned his own intention of doing so, and, like the rest of the company, possessed his soul in silence. In the meantime he watched the others with a good deal of interest and speculation.

They were a strangely mixed company : a few of them, of whom Edwin himself was one, mere boys, to whom the air of the schoolroom still clung : some obvious men of the world, scrupulously, even doggily dressed, in an age when the fancy waistcoat had reached the zenith of its daring; others, and one other in particular, a seedy looking person with a dejected fair moustache, were clearly old enough to be the fathers of the youngest. It was to the second of these classes, the bloods, that Edwin found his attention attracted, and particularly to a paragon of elegance, whose waistcoat was the orange colour of a blackbird's bill with light blue enamelled buttons, whose hair was mathematically bisected and shone with expensive unguents, and whose chin differed from that of Edwin in being shaved from sheer necessity instead of from motives of encouragement.

This person exuded an atmosphere of prosperity and style that took Edwin's fancy immensely, and he wore gray flannel trousers as correctly turned up as any that Edwin had seen upon the enchanted platform of the station at Oxford. It was evident that the process of waiting bored him; for he took out of the pocket of the amazing

waistcoat a gold hunter watch with a front enamelled in the same shade of light blue. The lid flicked open noiselessly when he touched a spring, and Edwin began to be exercised in his mind as to what happened when he put on a waistcoat of a different pattern (as obviously a person of this degree of magnificence must frequently do. Did he change the buttons, or did he change the watch? Edwin, surveying him, looked unconsciously at his own Waterbury; and, as he did so, the magnificent creature glanced at him with a pair of savage brown eyes, and, as Edwin decided, summed him up for good and all.

'Mr Harrop, please,' said the porter. And Mr Harrop pocketed his hunter and disdainfully entered the office.

Edwin, relieved from his scrutiny, turned his attention to the most impressive figure of all: a young man fully six feet four in height, but so broadly and heavily built that his tallness was scarcely noticeable. His face was good-humoured, and very plain, with the look of battered obstinacy that may sometimes be seen in that of a boxer. Perhaps this idea was reinforced by the fact that his short nose was broken, and that he carried his whole face a little forward, staring out at the world from under bushy black eyebrows. He seemed made for rough usage, and his undoubted strength was qualified by a degree of awkwardness that showed itself in his clumsy hands. These, at the present time, were clasped behind his back, beneath the folds of a brand-new undergraduate's gown that, because of his great height, looked ridiculously small. His whole aspect was one of terrific earnestness. Evidently he was taking this business, as he would surely have taken any other, seriously. That, no

doubt, was the reason why on this occasion he alone appeared in academical dress. His clasped hands, his lowered head, his bulldog neck all spoke of a determination to go through with this adventure at all costs.

'Mr Brown,' said the porter, and nearly blundering into the returning elegance of Mr Harrop, he slouched into the Dean's office as though he were entering the ring for the heavy-weight championship of the world.

In the end Edwin found himself left alone with a youth of his own age, a tall, loose-limbed creature, with an indefinite humorous face, a close crop of curly fair hair and blue eyes. Edwin rather liked the look of him. He was young, and seemed approachable, and though his striped flannel suit was more elegant than Edwin's and he wore a school tie of knitted silk, Edwin took the risk of addressing him.

'We seem to be the last.'

'Yes. I expect the Dean will keep me last of all, bad cess to him! That's because I happen to be a sort of cousin of the old devil's.' He spoke with a soft brogue that had come from the south of Ireland.

'Mr Ingleby, please.'

Edwin pulled himself together and entered the Dean's office.

A pleasant room: at one big desk a suave, clean-shaven gentleman with thin sandy hair and gold-rimmed spectacles. At another a little dark man with a bald head and a typewriter in front of him.

'Mr Ingleby?' said the first. His voice was refined, if a little too precise.

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, Mr Ingleby, what are you going to do? Ah, yes . . . you are the Astill scholar. Very good. Very good. Are you proposing to take a London degree?'

'No, sir. North Bromwich.'

'Well . . . it is possible you may change your mind later. Have you taken the London Matriculation?'

'No, sir. I was on the classical side at St Luke's. I was reading for a scholarship at Oxford.'

'And changed your mind . . . or' (shrewdly) 'had it changed for you?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Is your father a doctor?'

'No.' It really doesn't matter what my father is, thought Edwin, and the Dean, as though answering his reflection, said:—

'No. . . . That doesn't matter.' And, after a pause: 'Well, Mr . . . er . . . Ingleby, you have made a good beginning. I hope it will continue satisfactorily. That is all, thank you. Good-morning.' He held out his hand to Edwin, who was astonished into putting out a moist hand himself. 'Yes,' continued the Dean in a suave, reflective voice, 'you will pay your fees to my secretary, Mr Hadley. This is . . . er . . . Mr Hadley. Yes.'

Mr Hadley acknowledged the introduction with a lift of the right eyebrow and Edwin left the room.

'Mr Martin,' said the secretary, as he left, and 'Mr Martin, please,' the porter repeated.

'I say, wait a moment for me,' said the loose-limbed Irishman to Edwin in passing.

It was so friendly as to be cheering.

'He seems a decent old bird,' said Martin, emerging a few minutes later.

'I thought you said he was your cousin?'

'So he is. You see I'm Irish, and so is he; and in Ireland pretty nearly everybody who *is* anybody is related to everybody else.' He plunged into a lengthy demonstration of the relationships of the Southern aristocracy, with warnings as to the gulfs that separated the Martins from the Martyns, and the Plunketts from the Plunkets, rambling away through a world of high-breeding and penury in which all the inhabitants called each other by their Christian names, and spent their lives in hunting, point-to-point racing, and elaborate practical jokes. A new world to Edwin.

They strolled down Sackville Row together, and cutting through the Arcades came out into the wide thoroughfare of Queen Street that had been driven through an area of slums in honour of Victoria's first jubilee.

'By the way, what's your school?' said Denis Martin.

'St Luke's.'

'Never heard of it.'

'I don't suppose you would, in Ireland.'

'Oh, I didn't go to school in Ireland. Nobody does. I was at Marlborough. Is St Luke's one of those soccer schools.'

'Good Lord, no. . . . We play rugger. We're pretty good.'

'Who do you play?'

'Merchant Taylors and St Paul's, and one or two others.'

'H'm. . . . They're day schools, aren't they. Is St Luke's that sort?'

Edwin, with enthusiasm, expounded the St Luke's legend, that nobody outside of St Luke's has ever been known to believe. Martin, meanwhile,

looked a little supercilious and bored. He spoke as from a distant world in a tone that implied that the people of North Bromwich could never call each other by their Christian names or hunt or race or play practical jokes with an air of being born to it.

'I expect we're a pretty mixed lot here,' he said.

And Edwin, with the guilty consciousness of being more than a little mixed himself, replied: 'Yes.'

'An extraordinary collection. That great dark fellow looks an absolute tyke. Then there's the chap with the waistcoat——'

'Yes. . . . Harrop was the name.'

'I don't know the name,' said Martin dubiously. 'Never heard of the family. He was wearing an Oriel tie.'

'Oriel. . . . Do you mean Oxford?'

'Yes, one of my cousins was there. That's how I know it. I should think they turfed him out on account of that waistcoat. Still, Oxford isn't what it used to be.' 'In the eyes of a Southern Unionist,' he might have added. But the news was grateful to Edwin. 'I shouldn't wonder,' Martin went on, 'if lots of decent people didn't end by coming to schools like this. I expect it is the Dean's idea, you know. I say, what about lunch? Do you know of any decent place?'

In ancient days, when he had come into North Bromwich shopping with his mother, Edwin had always been taken to Battie's, the great confectioner's in Queen Street, but now, passing the doors in this exalted company, he felt that the company of a crowd of shabby shopping women would hardly be suitable: besides, he might even run the risk

of meeting his Aunt Laura, who also frequented the shop, so he left Battie's prudently alone.

'I know one place,' said Martin. 'I should think it's all right. The food's decent anyway.'

He led the way up a side street to an elegant resort frequented by the professional classes of North Bromwich, where there was a long counter set out with sandwiches like a buffet at a dance, and all the customers seemed at home. In the ordinary way Edwin would not have dared to enter it, but Martin, with the elegant confidence of Southern Unionism, showed him the way, and seated at a marble-topped table they trifled with Plover on toast. Martin, of course, did the choosing, and in his dealings with the tiny carcass showed a familiarity with the correct method of consuming small birds that Edwin was pleased to learn. 'Ever shoot plover?' he said. No . . . Edwin had never shot anything: he didn't particularly want to shoot anything; but he realised that it was a great accomplishment to be able to talk about it as though he had never done anything else.

'I'll pay,' said Martin. 'We can square up afterwards.'

They did so and, thawed by the process of feeding, began to talk more easily. 'Are you digging in this place?' Martin asked. Edwin told him that he lived in the country.

'In the country? I didn't know there was any here. Have you any decent shooting?'

'Unfortunately, no. 'He remembered, however, the solitary trout under the bridge below the abbey. 'There's fishing of sorts,' he said.

'What sorts?'

'Oh, trout——'

'Brown trout? There's not much fun in that. White trout . . . sea trout you call them in England . . . are good sport. Still, we'll have a day together next spring. I'll get my rods over.'

The subject was dangerous, and so Edwin asked him where he was living: 'With your cousin, I suppose.'

'Oh, no. . . . I don't know the old divil, you know. I've rooms with an old lady up in Alvaston. She's rather a decent sort. House full of animals.' He didn't specify what the animals were. 'I'd better go and unpack some of my things. I suppose I shall see you at the Chemistry Lecture to-morrow. So long. . . . Oh, I forgot. . . . What's your name?'

'Ingleby.'

'Ingleby. . . . Right-o.' He boarded a passing bus with the air of stepping on to a coach and four.

Edwin took the next train home. On the opposite platform of the station he caught a glimpse of the great bulk of the man named Brown walking up and down with earnestness in his eyes and under his arm a huge parcel of books. He gave Edwin the impression of wanting to throw himself into the adventure of the medical curriculum as he might have thrown himself into a Rugby scrum, expecting a repetition of the tremendous battering that he seemed already to have undergone.

Thinking of him, and of the aristocratic Martin, and of Harrop, a product which Oriel had finished to the last waistcoat button, and, more dimly, of the elderly gentleman with the dejected moustaches, it seemed to Edwin that he himself was appallingly young and callow and inexperienced. How was he going to stand up to these

people with their knowledge of the world and its ways: men who had already, by virtue of their birth or experience, learned how to dress and live and move without effort in the crowded world? Yet with them, he knew, he must now take his place. It would be difficult . . . awfully difficult. He had everything, even the most elementary rules of conduct, to learn. He was a child who had never known another human being except his mother and a few school friends of his own age. He had not even the *savoir-vivre* of Griffin. And, in this new life, it seemed to him that the dreams on which he had depended must be useless—or even more, a positive handicap to his success.

The moments of sudden spiritual enlightenment that one reads of in the lives of saints, or of converts to Salvationism, are not a common experience in those of ordinary men; and though, in the turn of every tide, there is a critical period, measurable by the fraction of a second, in which the waters that have swayed forwards retire upon themselves, to the eyes of an observer the change of motion is so gradual as to be only slowly perceived. In Edwin's life the death of his mother had been the real point of crisis; but this he had only dimly realised when his hopes of Oxford had been dashed for ever in a third-class compartment hurtling under Bredon Hill. Between it and the present moment there had hung a period of dead water (so to speak) in which the current of his life had seemed suspended; but now he knew that there was no doubt but that a change had overtaken him, and that he would never again be the same.

All his life, up to this point, had been curiously inorganic: a haphazard succession of novel and bewildering sensations: a kaleidoscope of sensual

impressions changing almost too rapidly to be appreciated—so rapidly that it had been impossible for him to think of one in relation to another. Some of them had been painful; some enthralling in their beauty; some merely engrossing because they were full of awe: yet all had been ecstatic, and tinged in some degree with a visionary light. Now, as always, it was clear that he must be a dreamer; but, from this day onwards, it also became clear that his visions must be something more to him than a series of coloured impressions, succeeding one another without reason and accepted without explanation. In the future they must be correlated with experience and the demands of life. In that lost age of innocence the people with whom he came into contact had interested him only as figures passing through the scenes that were spread for his delectation. They had been external to him. He had lived within himself and his loneliness had been so self sufficient that it would have made no great difference to him if they had not been there. Now he was to take his part in the drama at which, in times before, he had merely sat as a bemused spectator. It was a stirring and a terrifying prospect.

The train from North Bromwich stopped at every station, and the whole of the journey lay through the black desert that fringes the iron city, a vast basin of imprisoned smoke, bounded by hills that had once been crowned with woods, but were now dominated by the high smoke-stacks of collieries, many of them ruined and deserted. At a dirty junction, so undermined with workings that the bridge and the brick offices were distorted in a manner which suggested that the whole affair might some day go down quick into the pit, he

changed into the local train. The railway company evidently did not consider the passenger traffic of Halesby worth consideration, for the carriages were old and grimy. Edwin chose a smoker because the cushions were covered with American leather and therefore more obviously clean. He found himself, in the middle of his reflections, sitting opposite a coloured photograph of the great gorge at Axcombe, a town that was served by the same line. The picture carried him suddenly to another aspect of his too complicated life. Really, the whole business was hopelessly involved. He thought, grimly, how he could have taken the wind out of Martin's genealogical sails by blurting out the astounding intelligence that his uncle was a gardener. And what would the gentleman with the waistcoat have said? He laughed at the idea.

Through a short but sulphurous tunnel the train emerged into the valley of the Stour: the vista of the hills unfolded, and later the spire of Halesby church appeared at the valley's head. Well, a beginning of the new life had to be made some day, and now as well as ever.

Walking home along the cinder pathway beside the silting fish-ponds it seemed to him that in the light of his new experience, Halesby was a primitive and almost pitiable place, and the same mood held him when he made his way home by the short cut through Mrs. Barrow's cloistered garden and entered his father's house. Under the south wall the bed of double stocks was still in flower, though faded and bedraggled. Their scent reminded him of what a world of experience he had traversed in less than three months. He went straight up to his own bedroom. On the bed lay two parcels addressed to him. The larger contained his

undergraduates cap and gown. He put them on in front of the glass and rather fancied himself. The act struck him as in a way symbolical: it was the token of an initiation. From that day forward he was a medical student. For five or six years, probably for the rest of his life, he would spend his time in the presence of the most bitter human experience; but there was something elevating in the thought that he need not be a helpless spectator: he would be able to effect positive good in a way that no scholar and no preacher of religion or abstract morality could possibly attain. 'This is my life,' he thought. Well, it was good to know anything as definite as that.

The second parcel contained a number of technical books dealing with the subjects of his first year's curriculum: Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Physiology, and Anatomy. The last appeared to be the most exciting. 'Fearfully and wonderfully made . . .' he thought. He set to work at once preparing the little room for work, making it as comfortable as he could with a writing table in the window that looked out over Shenstone's woods and dethroning the superannuated Henty and Fenn from the bookshelf. He could not find it in his heart to treat his poets so cavalierly, and so there they stayed. Greek and Latin and English. 'I shall never drop my classics,' he thought. A resolution that has been forgotten nearly as often as it has been made. In the Blenheim orange-tree at the bottom of the garden a thrush was singing. Bullfinches were fighting shrilly in the raspberry canes. He threw open the window, and there ascended to him the heavy, faded perfume of the bed of stocks. On the mantelpiece stood a photograph of his mother. Looking at it, it seemed to him that she smiled.

CHAPTER II

MORTALITY BEHOLD . . .

I

He was happy: even Halesby became a grateful place of retirement after his long days in North Bromwich. The mornings of early autumn were very beautiful, and it was with a good deal of zest that he would scramble through his breakfast and leave the house early to catch the eight o'clock train. He usually made use of the short cut through Mrs Barrow's garden and the cinder path beside the fish-ponds, and in this brisk walk, with the blood of youth running happily in his veins, he would catch a little of the exhilarating atmosphere of early morning in the country. When the frosts began, as they do early on that high plateau, the morning air seemed stronger and more bracing than ever.

Circumstance, in a little more than three months, had exalted him to the state of those metropolitan season-ticket holders whose majesty he had disturbed on the day when he left St Luke's for good. He was now in a position to appreciate their exclusiveness, and to look upon all chance people who intruded on the privacies of the eight o'clock train with the same mingled curiosity and contempt. In every way a season ticket, in its cover of dark blue morocco, was a thing superior to the transitory and ignoble pasteboard. He could hardly resist a sigh of bored superiority on the first occasion when he produced it. He travelled second-class, thus

rising to the highest level of luxury in travelling permitted to any inhabitants of Halesby, unless it were the local baronet or Mr Willis of Mawne, whom even Sir Joseph Hingston could not outdo.

Most of the other season-ticket holders travelled second; and in this way, by making a habit of taking his place in the same carriage, for sentimental reasons one that contained a series of west-country pictures, Edwin began to be on speaking terms with many members of this select company. They included a youth articled to a solicitor in North Bromwich, the son of a Halesby postmaster, who was inclined to establish terms of familiarity; a gentleman with a bloated complexion and a fawn-coloured bowler hat, reputed to be a commercial traveller, who carried a bag in which samples may well have been hidden; a superior person with a gruff voice who was a clerk in a bank in the city, and on Saturdays carried a brown canvas bag and a hockey stick; and a withered man of fifty who travelled into North Bromwich daily on some business connected with brass, and, on damp mornings, exhibited evidences of an asthmatic complaint that aroused Edwin's budding professional interest.

It was he who first admitted Edwin to the conversation of the compartment, by confessing to him that he had been the despair of doctors since childhood: that three specialists had assured his mother that she would never rear that boy: that in spite of this he had always paid four times as much in doctor's bills as in income-tax, that in his belief they only kept him alive for what they could get out of him, and that his life had been an unending misery, as harrowing, upon his word, as that of any of the sufferers who were

illustrated in the papers holding their backs with kidney complaint, until his missus had said: 'Don't throw any more money away on these doctors, John, I'll have a talk with Mr Ingleby,' . . . and with the aid of Ingleby's Asthma Cure he had become relatively whole. Evidently he knew who Edwin was. 'What do you think of that now?' he wheezed, and covered the embarrassment into which Edwin was immediately thrown by not waiting for his reply and continuing: 'I suppose, now, you'll be learning to be a chemist like your father?'

'No . . . I'm a medical student. I'm going to be a doctor.'

'Well . . . I'll be damned,' said the asthmatical person. He did not say why; but the looks of the superior bank clerk, who immediately lowered his paper and stared at Edwin as though it were his duty to decide whether Edwin were a fit person to enter a learned profession or not, and then contemptuously went on with his reading, supplied the kind of commentary that might have been intended. When the asthmatical subject said that he was damned, the gentleman with the bloated complexion and the fawn-coloured bowler, who always opened his morning paper with fingers that trembled, either with excitement or as a result of the night before, at the column headed Turf Topics, gave a snigger and spat on the floor to conceal it. And the articled clerk, at this display of ill breeding, turned up his nose.

It was a strange little company that assembled in the second-class smoker every morning; and the strangest part of it, to Edwin, was the fact that each of them, entrenched, as it were, behind his morning paper, affected a frigid disinterest,

yet eagerly listened to the conversation and eagerly scrutinised the appearance of the others. All of them had their little fixed habits. In one place they put their gloves: in another their umbrellas. Every morning they began to read their papers at the same column and folded them at the same point in the journey. They seemed just as regular in their habits as the wheels of the carriage in which they travelled, revolving and stopping and shunting and being braked at an identical time and place for six days out of the seven.

When he had tumbled to this, Edwin found that the whole of the main line train that he caught every morning at the junction was occupied by perhaps a hundred grouped units of the same kind. It amused him to sample them; and when one appealed to him he would become a member of it for a time and see what he could make of it. Naturally there were more interesting people on the main line than on the Halesby branch; and in the end he himself became such a familiar figure on the eight-twenty from the junction that he could say 'Good-morning' to nearly every group of seasons on the train. He was even taken to the heart of the superior gruff-voiced bank clerk in the Halesby carriage. Indeed, he knew every one of them, finding them human people who, in the manner of the Englishman and the hedgehog, had put out their protective spikes upon a first acquaintance.

The only Halesby traveller of whom he could make nothing was the bloated person in the fawn-coloured bowler, who began the morning with turf topics and then proceeded to suck a copying pencil till his lips were the colour of his

cheeks, and, thus inspired, to underline the names of a number of horses in the day's programme. Apart from his habit of spitting on the floor, a custom which probably saved the poor man from death by poisoning with copying ink, he was inoffensive. Edwin was even sorry for him sometimes when he saw him hung up over his forecasts. Then he would tilt the fawn coloured bowler on to the back of his head, and scratch his head under the sandy fringe of hair. Edwin was sorry because, with a head like that, it must have been so difficult to forecast anything.

He did not see many women on the morning train. In those days female enterprise was a good deal checked by conventions that died more slowly in the Midland plain than elsewhere. From Halesby itself there were only four season-ticket holders of the opposite sex. Two of them were employed in the same large drapery establishment in Queen Street, and were excessively ladylike and careful in all their behaviour. Edwin had never spoken to either of them; but he discovered in both an identical physical state: that peculiar greenish, waxen pallor that appears to be the inevitable result of serving in a draper's shop. The black dresses, on which their employers insisted, heightened this effect of fragility, and on mornings when tiredness had made them start too late for the train, so that they had to hurry over the last hundred yards, Edwin would notice how they panted for breath within their elegant corsets and how faint was the flush that came into their cheeks.

He felt a little sorry for them; but they were not in the least sorry for themselves. In Halesby their employment at a monstrous third-rate drapery store gave them a position of unusual distinction

as arbiters of feminine fashions, and they would not have exchanged their distinguished anæmia for any other calling under the sun. In their profession this toxic pallor, as of sea-kale blanched in a cellar, was regarded as an asset. It was considered French. And did not their shortness of breath, upon the least exertion or emotion, cause their bosoms to rise and fall like those of the heroines of the serial fiction that they read, when they were not too tired, in the train?

Edwin was not attracted by them any more than by the other couple: a pair of pupil teachers from an elementary school in one of the northern suburbs, who also dressed for the part that they were fulfilling in life, and wore spectacles as tokens of their studiousness. The instinct of sex had as yet scarcely asserted itself in him. He was a little curious about it, and that was all. Subconsciously, perhaps, it found expression in his anxieties about his personal appearance. He was beginning to take a considerable interest in what should or should not be worn, treating it more as a matter of abstract science than as one of practical politics; for he had few clothes beyond those in which he had left St Luke's, and was not likely to have any opportunity of extending his wardrobe until these were worn out. In those days the weekly called *To-Day* had reached its most vigorous phase, and a column headed Masculine Modes was a matter of earnest consideration to Edwin every Thursday, when the paper appeared. In the spring, he decided, he would buy an overcoat with Raglan sleeves. The weekly authority, who styled himself 'The Major,' was dead nuts on Raglan sleeves. Beneath this fashionable covering Edwin's interior defects would be well hidden, and, given a natty

red tie (*de rigueur*, said the Major, with the indispensable blue serge reefer suit) and a bowler hat with a curly, but not too curly, brim, he should be able to compete with the burly bank clerk as cynosure for the eyes of the pale young ladies in the 'drapery' and a spectacle of awe for the studious pupil-teachers

II

Edwin soon became absorbed in the routine of the first year student's life, and had very little time to think about anything else. He had to work hard to keep pace with it, and the realisation of this was a striking lesson to him. At St Luke's he had found that his advance in knowledge made the work progressively more easy. Here he was breaking new ground from the beginning, acquiring knowledge of a kind that owed nothing to general culture and came to him none the easier for his possession of it. The only things in his new work that seemed easy and logical to him were those scientific names that were derived from Latin and Greek. Otherwise the very rudiments and nature of the subjects were new to him.

The most astonishing part of the whole business was the way in which the formidable assembly that had glared at him, as he imagined, outside the Dean's office, simplified itself. He had been prepared to find them creatures of a different tissue from himself, and particularly such apparitions as Harrop and the immense Brown. He soon saw that as far as the career of Medicine was concerned they were identically in the same box as himself: that neither knowledge of the world nor elegance of attire could help either of them to acquire the

absolute knowledge that was the one thing essential to success. It made no matter that these two approached the same problem from essentially different angles: Brown with his earnest brows knitted and a look of indomitable but baffled determination; Harrop as though the issue didn't really matter as long as the crease in his trousers was in the right place; but in either case Edwin saw that they had to work as hard or harder than he did.

His first acquaintance, Martin, who was now becoming his friend, since the work that they shared in common bridged the social gulf of which Edwin alone was aware, seemed to possess the faculty of doing things and learning facts almost in spite of himself. He was not in any way brilliant, but he had a way with him and a certain shrewdness that not infrequently underlies the superficial indolence of the Celt. Above all things Edwin found him good company, for the picturesqueness of his brogue and a sense of humour, not of the verbal kind in which Edwin himself dealt, but the broader humour that arises from situations, and personal characteristics, made his society a peculiar joy. At the first lecture on Chemistry, a dull dissertation on first principles, Edwin had gravitated to the seat next to him, and for the rest of the term they kept the same places and afterwards compared notes. Edwin couldn't help liking him, even though he was conscious of the radical social misunderstanding that underlay their friendship.

The technical sciences of Chemistry and Physics made no strong appeal to Edwin. They seemed to him matters of empirical knowledge that must be acquired according to schedule but would have

very little connection with the work of his profession, and he found them too near to the desperate subject of mathematics to be congenial. He could find nothing romantic or human in them; and this fact, in itself, is a sufficient indictment of the way in which they were taught.

Anatomy was another matter altogether. He had anticipated the beginning of this study with a feeling in which awe and an instinctive distaste were mingled. From the first day he had known that somewhere up at the top of the building lay the dissecting room, a place that his fancy painted as a kind of Chamber of Horrors. On his way to the theatre, in which the Dean lectured on Anatomy with a scholarly refinement of phrase that transcended the natural elegance of Martin and a fascinating collection of coloured chalks, he had passed the gloomy door and seen a blackboard on which the names of the Prosectors were recorded in white lettering. But he preferred not to look inside. Martin, to whom all adventures came more easily, settled the point for him.

'I say,' he said immediately after the lecture, 'have you put yourself down for a part?'

'A part? What do you mean?'

'Anatomy. Dissecting. They're shared between two, you know. In the first term we're supposed to do an Upper or a Lower. Suppose we go shares in one——'

'All right,' said Edwin. 'Which shall it be?'

'Well, I think an Upper will be better. There's less fat and mess about it. We'd better go and choose one now.'

'All right.'

'Come along, then.' Martin opened the door of the dissecting room and held it while Edwin entered.

It was a long, irregular chamber, with a low glass roof and an asphalt floor. Edwin's first impression was one of light and space: the second, of a penetrating odour unlike anything that he had smelt before. He could not give a name to it, and indeed it was complex, being compact of a pungent, unknown antiseptic and another fainter smell that was, in fact, that of ancient mortality. The effect of the whole was strange but not nauseating as he would have expected. All down the room at short intervals long zinc tables, with a tin bucket at the head of each, were ranged. Most of the tables were empty; but on four or five of them 'subjects' were either displayed or lay draped in coarse, unbleached calico. One or two of them sprawled on their faces, but most of them, being as yet unappropriated, were supported under their backs by small metal platforms from which the heads rolled back and the limbs were stretched out in a posture of extreme but petrified agony. To Edwin's eyes it was a lamentable and terrible sight. He wondered by what chain of degradations the body of a man who had lived and known the youth and pride of body that he himself possessed, who had experienced aspirations and dreams and hope and love, should descend to this final indignity. He stood still. He did not dare, for the moment, to come nearer.

'How do they get here?' he asked Martin.

'Oh, they're paupers, you know. Old men and women, most of them, who die in the workhouses and are not claimed by their relatives. Instead of burying them they send them along here. The anatomy porters collect them. Then they're pickled for so long in a kind of vat in the cellars of this place, and they inject them with arsenic to preserve

them, and pump red paint into their arteries so that they're easier to dissect. I shouldn't like the job myself; but I suppose the porters are used to it. You get used to anything, you know. Besides, they aren't a bit like they are when they're first dead. I think that's the chap for us. I had a look at him the other day. It's always better to choose an old one. The muscles are cleaner. Less work.'

They approached the second table. The subject was an old and withered man: his gray hair was shaven, and his mouth hung open, showing that he had lost his teeth. Martin had been quite right. He didn't look in the least like a dead man. He did not look like a man at all: only a pathetic, tanned skeleton with tight-drawn sinews and toughened skin: a dried mummy, from which all the contours of humanity had shrunk away. It wasn't so bad after all. The picture that Edwin's imagination had anticipated, that of a crude and horrible human shambles, was not here. No . . . the idea of humanity was too remote to be in the least insistent. For a moment, in spite of this consolation, Edwin went pale. Martin noticed it.

'I say, this isn't going to turn you up, is it?'

'No. . . . I'm all right. I was only . . . thinking.'

'Thinking?' said Martin, with a laugh. 'I shouldn't do too much of that if I were you. We'd better make a start to-morrow on the right Upper. I'll put our names down.'

He turned towards the glass case in which hung notices of lectures and the printed cards on which the names of dissectors were recorded, and while he did so Edwin still stood thinking. He thought: Was this really a man who had lived

and breathed and aged and suffered? Where had he been born? How long ago? Had he ever loved? Had he ever married? Had he ever wondered what the future would bring to him? surely his fancies had never envisaged this. Perhaps he had been born in some remote hamlet of the marches, some sweet smelling village like Far Forest, from which the iron tentacles of the city had drawn him inwards and sapped his life, leaving, in the end, this dry shell, like the sucked carcass of a fly blowing in a spider's web. If this were the end of poverty and desolation, what a terrible thing poverty must be. Did the poor and the outcast ever dream that they might come to this? And yet, after all, what did it matter? . . .

He awoke from his dream. It was evident that he was the only dreamer in that long room. At many of the other tables second year men were sitting quietly dissecting or gossiping or thumbing manuals of practical anatomy yellow with human grease. It amazed him that men should be able to joke and smoke their pipes and appear to be contented in such an atmosphere; but the wisdom of Martin's phrase returned to him: 'You get used to anything, you know.'

Among the dissectors already at work in their white overalls, he saw the ponderous frame of the man called Brown. He, at any rate, was not letting the grass grow under his feet. Already he was engaged in reflecting the skin from the 'Lower' on which he was working. His clumsy hands found the work difficult, as was shown by the anxiety of his partner, an immaculate smooth young man, whom Edwin already knew by the name of Maskew, dressed in the Major's indispensable navy serge reefer, with the correct red tie and a big orchid

in his buttonhole. He took an elaborate meerschaum pipe out of his mouth to protest :—

'Good Lord, Brown, there's another cutaneous nerve gone phut. Do be careful!'

And Brown, with an exaggerated earnestness :—

'I say, old man, I am sorry. I simply can't use the damned things. Do you mean to say that's a nerve?' He held up in his forceps a tiny white filament of tissue.

'Yes,' said Maskew, returning to his pipe. 'Branch of the great gluteal. Listen to what Cunningham says: "The buttock is liberally supplied with cutaneous nerves: a fact much appreciated by schoolboys."'

Brown scratched his head with the handle of his scalpel. 'Well, I'm in an absolute fog. You'd better take this job on to-morrow, and I'll do the reading. What does "cutaneous" mean, anyway?'

'Cutis,' thought Edwin, 'Skin.' After all, it seemed, the dead languages had their uses. By this time he had recovered from the first shock of his distaste; he was getting used to the odour of the room, and so, a moment later, he and Martin strolled over to a table at which one of the prosectors was engaged in preparing a specimen for the Dean's lectures. It was almost pleasant to watch the deftness with which he defined the line of a pink, injected artery, wielding his scalpel as delicately and as surely as a painter at work on a canvas. They watched him working in silence. 'Nice part, isn't it?' he said with condescension.

'Yes,' said Martin, 'this sort of thing must be rattling good practice for surgery.'

'Oh, surgery's quite different,' said the prosector. 'This is a lazy job. There's no hurry about it. This fellow won't bleed to death.'

So Edwin and Denis Martin began to work on their Upper, and the dissecting room that had been an abode of horror and an incentive to philosophy became no more than the scene of their daily labours. Edwin accepted his new callousness without regret for the sensitive perceptions that he had lost, for he saw that his heart and his imagination were not really less tender for the change; they had merely come to a working agreement with the demands of his new life, and had attained this satisfactory state not so much by a suppression of sensibility as by an insistence on the objective aspects of his work.

This fact explained to him, at the very beginning of his career, the fallacy of medical callousness in relation to pain or physical distress. He saw, on reflection, that if a doctor exaggerated the importance of subjective sensations in his patient he might well lose sight of his own object, which was nothing more nor less than removing their cause : that, for example, the fear of death, the anxiety of relatives and the patient's own perception of intolerable pain, were of infinitely less importance to the physician than the presence of a focus of danger in the patient's appendix. A sustained objectivity was the only attitude of mind in which a doctor could live at the same time happily and efficiently.

The only feature of the dissecting room that now seemed objectionable was the smell of the powerful antiseptic that was used for preserving the subjects. For a week or two Edwin was conscious of it pervading every moment of his life, his train-journeys, his meal-times, even his sleep. But in a little time his olfactory nerves became so used to it that they discounted its presence, and the fact that his neighbours in railway carriages did not seem to

shrink from him, convinced him that after all he did not go about the world saturated in odours of the charnel house.

The winter term went on, and to the sense of hurry and frustration that had embarrassed him at first and found its perfect expression in the knitted brows of the monstrous Brown, succeeded an atmosphere of leisure and method and ease. Edwin had time for other things than work. He began to know the men of his year, and to discover that even the most formidable of them weren't half as formidable as they had seemed. Harrop, indeed, was still a little remote. After the spaciousness of Oriel, where he had devoted a couple of years to a liberal education in which the acquisition of knowledge was of less importance than the acquisition of style, North Bromwich, with its concentration on the virtues rather than the graces of life and the very questionable sartorial shapes that inhabited it, naturally seemed a little cheap; but in a little time even Harrop became modified and humble if a little contemptuous, and the most resplendant of his waistcoats retained no more significance than the oriflamme of a lost cause.

Brown was the more approachable of the two, and for Brown, Edwin soon conceived something that was very nearly an affection. With his impressive physique and his experience of a rough world in which Edwin had never moved, was mingled a childlike enthusiasm for his new work, a rich, blundering good humour, and great generosity. He was not clever, and showed an intense admiration for better heads than his own; but for all that he was much more intelligent than he looked, and to Edwin his enthusiasm and earnestness were worth a good deal more than his intellectual attainments.

Once or twice, wandering into the Anatomical Museum, he had come upon Brown standing rapt in front of a specimen dissection or quietly sweating up bones with a Gray's *Anatomy* open before him, and he had sung out to Edwin as if he were an old friend of his own age and they had put in an hour of work together. 'You know, you're a lot quicker than I am,' said Brown. 'I suppose it comes of being decently educated. I expect that when you were learning Latin and Greek I was knocking about the world making a damn fool of myself.' Then they would light their pipes (the dissecting room had made smoking necessary to Edwin) and Brown would yarn on for half an hour about his romantic adventures, his bitter quarrels with his people, the adventures that had befallen him in Paris when he went there to play football for the Midlands, in all of which the passionate, headstrong, obstinate and withal lovable nature of the big fellow would appear.

'I expect it all sounds to you like a rotten waste of time, mucking about with my life like this,' he said. 'But you know I'm not at all sorry I've had it. . . . I didn't take up this doctoring business in a hurry. without thinking about it. I thrashed the matter out; and I came to the conclusion that doctoring's a good human sort of game: it's a sort of chance of pulling people out of the rotten messes of one kind or another that they get themselves into—through no fault of their own, poor devils, just because they're made like you and me and the rest of us. If you go on the bust, or knock about the country with a football team on tour, or go on the tramp and sleep in a hedge or a barn or a Rowton House, as I did when I had the last flare-up with the old

man, you rub against a lot of people. They're all just the same as yourself, you know. You can see yourself in the best of them as well as the worst; and, taking them all round, they're all damned good at the bottom. They've all got to fight out their own way in life with their heads or their fists or their feet. And the only chap that can really help them in it is a doctor. That's the conclusion I've come to. God! . . . you'll scarcely believe it, but once I was converted. I know it's damn funny; but it's a fact that when I was a youngster and had been on the periodical bust a revivalist chap got hold of me and persuaded me that I was saved. It's a funny sort of feeling, I can tell you. I thought I was going off my nut until I went to see a doctor and he put my liver right. It's a fine humane game, Ingleby. You can take it from me. . . . But I can tell you, with one thing and another, I've got my work cut out.'

He shook his head seriously, and the puzzled, dogged expression of frustrate determination that Edwin knew so well came into his eyes. 'We're wasting time, my son,' he said. 'Let's get on with the blasted humerus. Now, what is the origin of the Supinator Longus? Come on . . .'

On one of these pleasant occasions he confided to Edwin the reason why he had his work cut out. His father, a stern Calvinistic Methodist, had finally washed his hands of him. 'I've been a bit of a rolling stone, you see,' said Brown, 'and you can't blame the poor old fellow. So he just planked down six hundred and fifty pounds one day and told me that I could do what I liked with it, but that was the last I should get from him. It suited me down to the ground. I didn't much care what became of me then. It was a couple of years ago.

So I had a royal bust . . . a sort of glorious wind-up to the season . . . and then sat down to think. I had just five hundred left, and so I had to think what the devil I was going to do with it, and my prospects seemed so putridly rotten that the only thing I could do was to go on the bust again. I didn't enjoy it much that time. Jaded palate, you know. . . . But I had a bit of luck. I met a trainer fellow in the Leicester lounge with a couple of women, and he put me on to a double for the Lincoln and National. I've no use for horse-racing. If it was the owners that were racing there'd be a vestige of sport in it; but it always seems to me a shame that decent, clean creatures like horses should make a living for a lot of dirty stiffs out of the ruin of working men and small shopkeepers. Still, I dreamed about this double, and as I'm a weak superstitious sort of chap, I put a tenner on it. That's the first and the last bet I've ever had on a horse. But the thing happened to come off; and last spring I found myself with twelve hundred pounds instead of six-fifty. So I began to think it out. I remembered that doctor fellow who cured me of being converted, and I thought, " By Gad, I'll be a doctor." A five year's course. Well, I'm not particularly brilliant at the top end, and so I allowed six. Six into twelve goes twice. Two hundred a year for fees and living and clothes—out-size—and recreation. You see, it's pretty tight. Come along and have some lunch at Joey's.'

III

They went downstairs to the cloak-room where the porter was now a familiar of Edwin's. It had

been decided that it would not be becoming for a really modern university, like that of North Bromwich, to impose the sight of such an anachronism as academic dress on the streets, a rule that had been something of a disappointment to Edwin, and so they left their gowns behind. Joey's was an institution of some antiquity, opposite to the Corinthian town-hall, with which Brown had been acquainted in his unregenerate days. It was a long and noisy bar at which, for the sum of fourpence, one consumed a quarter of the top of a cottage loaf, a tangle of watercress, a hunk of Cheddar cheese, and a tankard of beer. This combination of excellences was known as a 'crust and bitter,' and it was eaten standing at the counter.

Edwin was gradually becoming a regular customer at this place; for Martin's delicate fancy for plovers on toast and other such refinements had proved too expensive for him, and apart from their joint labours in the dissecting-room, they were beginning to see less of each other—not from any ill-will on the part of either, but simply because Martin's position in the house of the old lady in Alvaston, whose house was full of animals, had introduced him to the social life of that elegant suburb in which so perfect a carpet knight was bound to shine; and Martin's social engagements with encouraging matrons and innumerable eligible daughters were becoming so pressing that his acquaintance with the black heart of the city was gradually becoming more and more casual. For this reason, apart from his natural inclination, Edwin was thrown into daily contact with Brown and his partner Maskew.

Maskew was a more typical product of the Midlands. His home, and all his upbringing, had lain in one of the great black towns that cluster,

like swollen knots, upon the North Bromwich system of railways. He had never lived in the country; he did not even know what country was, and his distinctive if provincial urbanity showed itself in a hundred ways—in his dress, that was a little too smart, in his speech, that was not quite smart enough, in a certain lack of fresh air in his mental atmosphere. His people were wealthy, and his tastes, without emulating the style of Harrop, were expensive. He was handsome, and if his hair had been shorter and not so mathematically correct he would have been handsomer. Still, he was intensely interested in women, and a great retailer of Rabelaisian stories. He wore buttoned boots and was very nearly a first-class billiard player.

A more unusual combination than his partnership with the abrupt and unsubtle Brown it would have been difficult to imagine; but even in his undoubted cleverness, his nature was complimentary, and Edwin found himself happy in the society of both. In their company he became a habitué of the Dousita Café; a subterranean privacy in which excellent coffee was served in the most comfortable surroundings by young ladies whose charms had already made something of a sensation in that decorous city. Maskew, naturally, knew them all by their Christian names, and treated them with a familiar badinage that impressed Edwin, mildly ambitious but quite incapable of imitation, by the ease with which it was performed. The cushioned seats and the mild stimulus of the coffee and cigarettes would even rouse the massive Brown to a ponderous levity by which the lady of their choice, a certain Miss Wheeler, whose uncle, Maskew seriously confided

to Edwin, was a bishop, was obviously flattered. Edwin could understand any woman being attracted by Brown, or rather, 'W.G.,' as the need of a distinction had by this time made his familiar name. It also pleased him to see the way in which W.G. went red in his bull neck on a certain occasion when Maskew had delicately overstepped the limits of good taste in his conversation with Miss Wheeler. But the niece of the bishop did not blush. . . .

In the intervals between lectures they would congregate in their gowns in a dismal chamber, at the very bottom of the cramped building that was called the Common Room, drinking tea and eating squashed-fly biscuits. This place was frequented not only by members of the Medical School but by students of other faculties whom Edwin regarded with some contempt. One afternoon on entering this room Edwin found W.G. holding forth with some indignation before a notice that had been pinned on the board asking for a list of freshmen who were anxious to play Rugby football during the present season. So far, only five or six names had appeared : W.G.'s, naturally enough, came first, for his prowess in the game was well known in the North Bromwich district.

'Isn't it a damnable thing,' he said indignantly, 'in a school of this size to see a measly list like that?'

'You can stick mine down,' said Edwin.

'Well . . . as a matter of form, my son . . though I don't see what good you're likely to be to the club except to give it tone.'

'I play soccer,' said Maskew.

'You would,' said W.G. 'Nice gentlemanly game.'

'Rugger isn't all beef,' put in Edwin.

'No,' said W.G., 'but the team wants weight. And this place is simply thick with great, hefty, science men and brewers who've never known the meaning of a healthy sweat in their lives. Upon my word, it sickens me. Look at that chap.'

He pointed to a corner in which a big fellow lay huddled up in a deep basket chair. He had shoulders that would have appeared massive by the side of any others but W.G.'s: a fair wide face marked with freckles, a sandy moustache and crisp, curly red hair. 'That's the kind of swine that ought to be working in the scrum.'

Edwin looked, and as he did so, instinctively went pale. A curious survival of the instinct of physical fear had shaken him. It was ridiculous. 'I know that chap,' he said in an off-hand way. 'He's no good. I was at school with him. He's got a weak heart. His name's Griffin.'

CHAPTER III

CARNIVAL

I

CHRISTMAS came: an old-fashioned Christmas with hoar frost on the fields and hard roads gleaming with splintered light reflected from a frosty sky. In this raiment of frozen moisture even the black desert of Edwin's morning pilgrimage appeared fantastically beautiful. The vacation did not suspend his work; for though no lectures were given, the dissecting room was still open; and here, on icy mornings, when the asphalt floor was as cold as the glass roof, he would freeze for an hour at a time watching Brown and Maskew at work, Martin having been whisked off to spend a baronial Christmas of scratch dances in Ireland.

A few months in North Bromwich had made a great change in Edwin. He had lost much of his old timidity, shaved twice a week, smoked the plug tobacco to which Brown had introduced him, and was no longer shy with any creature on earth of his own sex. With women it was different. . . . Ease and familiarity with this baffling sex would come, no doubt, in time; but for the present one or two desperate essays at conversation with the elegant Miss Wheeler in the absence of his friends had been failures. And Miss Wheeler was not the least approachable of her sex. There were several women medical students in his year; but in their case he had not felt the incentive to gallantry that the softer charms of Miss Wheeler suggested. Even

if they had not insulated themselves with shapeless djibbehs of russet brown, and bunched back their hair in a manner ruthlessly unfeminine, the common study of a subject so grossly material as anatomy would have rubbed the bloom from any budding romance.

In the Biological laboratory, however, he found a figure that exercised a peculiar attraction on him. She was an American girl, a science student, who with the severity of the medical women's dress contrived to combine an atmosphere of yielding femininity. She had a soft voice, for the tones of which Edwin would listen, big grey-blue eyes, soft dark hair, and very beautiful arms that her dark overalls displayed to perfection. Edwin would have found it difficult to define the way in which she attracted him: certainly he didn't cherish any definite romantic ideas about her; but he did find her in some subtle way disturbing, so that he would be conscious of her presence when she came into the lab; surprise himself listening for her voice when she spoke to the professor, and find that, without any definite volition, his eyes were watching her profile. And one day when she passed him and her overall brushed his sleeve, he found that he was blushing. Maskew, with his usual easy familiarity, was already on joking terms with her, and would sometimes sit on the table where she kept her microscope while they talked and laughed together; but though Edwin had every chance of sharing in this intimacy, he couldn't bring himself to do so; and when, in the end, he was introduced to her formally, he wished that he were dead, and could not speak a word for awkwardness.

With men, on the other hand, he was now quite at his ease, even, strangely enough, with the once

formidable Griffin. Since the day when he had discovered his old enemy in the Common Room they had often spoken to one another: they had even sat side by side in the deep basket chairs, one of which was now Griffin's habitual abode, and talked of the old days at St Luke's, and sometimes, in the afternoon, they would share a pot of tea. There was no awkwardness in their conversation, as Edwin had feared there might be, for Griffin apparently took his expulsion as a matter of course, and, on the whole, as rather a good joke. Of course Griffin had changed. It was clear to Edwin from the first that in some way he had shrunk—not indeed physically, for he was fatter than ever; but the air of conscious and threatening physical superiority that Edwin had found so oppressive in his school days had vanished. Moreover, he was now prepared to accept Edwin as an equal, and make him the confidant of the amorous adventures that now absorbed his time, adventures to which the affair with the chambermaid at St Luke's had been the mildest possible prelude. Compared with Griffin's positive achievements, the daring of Maskew's relation with the young ladies of the Dousita seemed a trifle thin. Griffin's father, with a shrewd appreciation of his son's peculiar gifts, had entered him as a student at the school of brewing; and if once he could overcome his natural indolence, there was no reason why, in the future, he should not become a partner in the firm of his uncle, Sir Joseph Astill, and control the destinies of a number of barmaids beyond the dreams of concupiscence. On these prospects, Griffin, lounging in his basket chair, brooded with a heavy satisfaction.

'It's a funny thing, isn't it?' Edwin said one

day, 'that we should be the only St Luke's men in this place.'

'Oh, some are bound to turn up sooner or later,' said Griffin. 'The other day, when I was up in town, I ran against Widdup—you remember Widdup—and he told me that his people thought of sending him here to take up engineering.'

'That would be rather good fun,' said Edwin. 'And he's cut out for it too. He's got that sort of head. I should rather like to see old Widdup.'

'Oh, he'll roll up one of these days. Are you doing anything in particular this afternoon? I have to stroll down to see the stage-manager at the Gaiety . . . an awful good sport. Suppose we go down the town and get a drink on the way . . .'

In spite of the temptations of this adventure, Edwin declined. In the dissecting room, half an hour later, Brown hailed him :—

'What the devil were you doing with that pig of a brewer, Ingleby?'

'He's an old school friend of mine.'

'Well, I should keep that dark, if I were you. He's a bad hat, that chap. We don't want Ingleby's virginal innocence corrupted, do we, Maskew?'

'Oh, he's not a bad sort,' Edwin protested.

'He's a nasty fellow, and he'll come to a rotten, sticky end,' said Brown. 'Now, what do you think of this small sciatic, you old roué, for a tricky bit of dissection?'

After all, Edwin reflected, old Brown knew something of the world. He had to admit to himself that there was something obscene about Griffin. It was difficult to explain, for Maskew, by his own account, was almost equally worldly, and yet Maskew was undeniably a decent fellow while

Griffin undeniably wasn't. He joined his friends at their work, and could think about nothing else; for Maskew's brains were as good as his own, though of a different texture, and he had to be attentive to keep pace with them. All through the vac he worked at anatomy with these two, sometimes in the icy dissecting room, sometimes over coffee at the Dousita, sometimes in the cosy, diminutive diggings that Brown inhabited in Easy Row, a street of Georgian houses at the back of the university buildings and near the Prince's Hospital.

They were pleasant days. Edwin, in spite of his lightness, had now found a place in the scrum of the second fifteen, and on Saturday evenings, when both of them were drugged with their weekly debauch of exercise, he and W.G. would meet at the diggings in Easy Row, and after a steaming hot bath, in the process of which Edwin never failed to be impressed by the immensity of his friend's physique, they would set off down the town together and make a tremendous meal at the Coliseum grill: Porterhouse steak with chipped potatoes and huge silver tankards of bitter ale. Then they would go on together to a theatre or a music hall, too pleasantly dulled, too mildly elated to question the humour of the most second-rate comedian. After the show W.G. would walk down to the station with Edwin, and see him off into the last train for Halesby, and Edwin, leaning out of the carriage window, would see the big man turn and go clumsily along the platform with the gait that he had noticed on the very first day of his life as a medical student. Brown was a wonderful fellow. In half an hour, Edwin reflected, when his train was still puffing away through the dark, W.G.

would be back in his diggings with a clay pipe stuck in his mouth and a huge text-book of Anatomy open on his knees, driving facts into that puzzled brain with the violent thoroughness of an engine that drives piles.

When the last train arrived at Halesby, the town would be in darkness, for, in the black country in those days the only places of amusement were the public houses and these had been shut for an hour or more. Only from the upper windows of innumerable mean dwellings lights would be seen, and sometimes the voice of a drunken husband heard grumbling. But the path beside the fish-ponds was beautiful, even on a winter night, and Edwin would feel glad as he plodded along it that he didn't live in North Bromwich, where the night noises of the country were never heard. So he would pass quietly up the empty lane, his footsteps echoing on the hard pavement, and come at last to the little house set in the midst of shrubberies that smelt of winter. Very humble and quiet, and even pitiable it seemed after the glaring streets of the city that he had left behind.

It was an understood thing that on Saturdays, when he had been playing football, Edwin should return by the last train; and so his father did not sit up for him on these occasions. The matter had been settled at the cost of some awkwardness. On the first two or three Saturdays of the football season Edwin had come home late, to find Mr Ingleby growing cold over the embers of a fire in the dining-room, sleepy but intensely serious, and his tired eyes had examined Edwin so closely that he felt embarrassed, being certain that his face must bear signs of a number of enormities that he had never dreamed of committing. It was the

same, unreasonable feeling of guilt that he had experienced at St Luke's in the middle of Mr Leeming's pitched battle for purity, and the sensation was so strong that he felt it useless to try and hide it.

'Why do you look at me like that, father?' he said. The quietude and humility of the little room seemed to him as full of accusation as his father's face.

'What do you mean, boy?'

'I think you know what I mean. . . . There's really no need for you to wait up for me like this.'

'I like to lock the house up,' his father replied, with a quietness that made Edwin's voice sound rowdy and violent. 'I have always done so. After all, it's usual.'

'You are anxious about me. Why should you be more anxious about me when I come in at twelve than when I come in at six?'

'I know you're passing a critical period, Eddie. . . . I'm not unsympathetic. I've been through it myself. And naturally I'm anxious for you. I know that a town is full of temptations for a boy of your age. I don't know what your friends are like. I don't know what sort of influences you're coming in contact with——'

'But I don't see why that should make you want to sit up for me. Really, I don't. What good does it do?'

'I like to see you when you come in.' Edwin was uncomfortably aware of this.

'But suppose I was drunk when I came in, father——' he said.

'I don't suppose anything of the sort——'

'No, but supposing I was. What advantage would there be in your seeing me? What good would it do?'

'At any rate I should know that there was a danger.'

'Well, if that's all the trouble, we can soon get over it. I promise you, that I'll tell you the very first time that I am in the least drunk. Then you needn't worry about waiting for it. I suppose it's bound to happen some day.'

'I sincerely hope it isn't, Eddie. It isn't pleasant to me to hear you talk like that.'

'No. . . . I suppose it would be pleasanter if we pretended that nothing of the kind ever happened. But it wouldn't be honest, would it? I should think it's the duty of every one to be drunk some time or other, if it's only to see what it feels like. Surely, father, *you*——'

'Edwin, Edwin. . . . Really we mustn't be personal. You forget that I'm your father.'

'But I don't, father. I thought we were going to be such tremendous pals, and honestly there isn't much to be pals on if you aren't ever personal. We ought to talk about everything. We oughtn't to hide anything. I don't see much fun in it if I have to do all the telling and you don't give anything in return. It isn't fair.'

'But, my dear boy,' said Mr Ingleby, 'with a nervous laugh, 'you seem to neglect the fundamental fact that I'm your father.'

'I don't see why that should prevent us being honest. I don't see why it should prevent you from trusting me——'

'I do trust you, Eddie.'

'Then that's all right; so you needn't wait up for me again.'

Thus the matter was settled, at any rate on the surface, though Edwin was always conscious on the morning after his late arrivals of an anxious scrutiny on his father's part.

'He doesn't really trust me,' he thought, and this conviction made him more anxious than ever to be really intimate with his father, to make him share, as much as possible, the life that he was living in North Bromwich. It made him talk deliberately of the men who were his friends, and the work that he was doing, explaining with the greatest freedom the domestic difficulties of W.G., and the worldly accomplishments of Maskew: and this frankness gave him confidence until he discovered that such revelations only ended by arousing his father's suspicions. In Mr Ingleby's mind it was evident that the sterling qualities of W.G., as recited by Edwin, were of less importance than his potentialities as an agent in Edwin's corruption. 'If I'd only given him one side of W.G.,' thought Edwin, 'he'd have been quite happy. If we're going to be happy, it would be much better for me to tell him nothing that his imagination can work on.'

He found himself travelling round the old vicious circle that appeared to be the inevitable result of being honest with himself. There must, after all, be something in the fundamental fact that Mr Ingleby was his father. Ridiculous though it might seem, the ideal relation between father and son was evidently impossible. 'Well,' he said with a sigh, 'it isn't my fault. I've done my best.'

The whole artificiality of their relation only dawned on him when he mentioned to his father one evening that he had met Griffin and told him that his old enemy turned out to be a nephew of Sir Joseph Astill. 'I'm glad to hear of it,' said Mr Ingleby. 'I hope you'll continue to be friends. Sir Joseph Astill is a very distinguished man.' Edwin didn't see what that had to do with it;

but he resisted the temptation of telling his father that Griffin was a distinctly bad egg, and that in comparison with him W.G., with his herculean passions, was indeed a paragon of knightly virtues. If it pleased his father to invest Griffin with his uncle's reflected glory, why shouldn't he do so? And Edwin held his tongue.

In the end the atmosphere of veiled anxiety that awaited him at home became definitely irksome, and since the most absolute candour on his part would not mend matters, he found himself gradually avoiding his father's company. It was the last thing in the world that he wanted to do; but it seemed inevitable; and as the months passed, he gave up all hopes of the sort of intimacy that he had desired, and relapsed into the solitude of his own room, or even, as a last resort, the company of Aunt Laura, who was at least unsuspicious.

Another thing attracted him to her house. All the days of his childhood at home had been full of music, for his mother had been a capable pianist, and he had spent long hours stretched out on the hearthrug in the drawing-room listening to her while she played Bach and Beethoven and occasionally Mendelssohn on the piano. At St Luke's, too, without any definite musical education, he had felt a little of the inspiration that Dr Downton infused into the chapel services. Since he had returned to Halesby all these pleasures had left him; for Mr Ingleby was not in the least musical, and the piano that had been closed a few days before his mother's death, had never been reopened. At this period he had not realised the musical possibilities of North Bromwich, and in Aunt Laura's house he recaptured a little of this stifled interest.

She was really an accomplished musician, and

though the kind of music that she affected was becoming limited by the very character of her life as the wife of an undistinguished manufacturer of small hardware in a small black-country town, the taste, which had originally been formed in Germany, existed and was easily encouraged by Edwin's admiration of her attainments. Here, usually on Sundays, when in addition to the attraction of music her admirable cooking was to be appreciated, Edwin passed many happy hours. She sang well, and could accompany herself with something of a natural genius, and though the songs that she sang were often enough the sugary ballads of the period that had witnessed her musical extinction, Edwin found them satisfying to his starved sense of music, and would even persuade her, on occasion, to play the pieces of Chopin, Beethoven, and Bach with which his mother had made him familiar.

Nothing aroused in him an acute remembrance of those ancient happy days more easily than music. He wished, above all things, that he might some day be able to taste these joys for himself; and so he persuaded his aunt to teach him the notes on the piano, and having an inherited aptitude, he soon found that he could pick his way through simple compositions, preferably in the open key, that he found among his mother's music at home. Mr Ingleby, who had no ear, appeared to be unmoved by these painful experiments; and to Edwin, the long winter evenings were made magical by their indulgence. He would sit at the piano in the drawing-room for hours at a time, and here, in a strange way, he found himself curiously in touch with the vanishing memory of his mother. At times this feeling was so acute that he could almost have imagined that she was there in the room

beside him, and sometimes he would sit still at the piano in long intervals of silence, just drinking in this peculiar and soothing atmosphere. Eventually these diversions made Mr Ingleby uneasy.

'You spend a good deal of time at the piano, Edwin,' he said. 'I do hope you are not letting it interfere with your work.'

Edwin said nothing; but from that time onward it seemed to him that even this, the most harmless of his amusements, had become a matter for grudging and suspicion. At first he only felt indignation and anger; but later he realised that this, along with his father's other anxieties, probably had its origin in financial considerations. The cost of his education in North Bromwich was a big thing for a country chemist to face. If once he failed, the whole of his early effort might be wasted. But then, he was not going to fail.

II

The terminal examinations at Christmas had made him sure of this. They showed him that in his own year he and Maskew were in a class by themselves; and though Maskew beat him easily in all the subjects of the examination, it satisfied him a little to think that Maskew had probably put in a good deal more work than he had, particularly in anatomy, where he had the advantage of working in partnership with W.G., for whom the subject of medical education was of the most deadly seriousness.

Early in the Lent term Edwin found himself introduced to a new stratum of North Bromwich society, through the accident of his acquaintance

with Griffin. The new university had inherited from the old college of science and the still older medical school, the tradition of a pantomime night, a visit *en masse* to one of the North Bromwich theatres, where this elevating art-form flourished for three months out of the twelve. The evening was one of fancy dress, rowdiness, and general licence, in which the stage suffered as much as the auditorium, and the unfortunate players were propitiated for the ruin of their performance by a series of presentations.

Arrangements for this function were always made with a high seriousness. The committee was composed of representatives from each year in the school of medicine and from each of the other faculties. In this affair, as in all matters of sport or communal life, the older foundation of the medical school took the most prominent part; but the prestige of Griffin as the nephew of the Vice-Chancellor and an acknowledged expert on all matters theatrical, had induced the brewers to run him for the secretaryship; and since the secretary was the official on whom the bulk of the work fell, and no one was particularly anxious to take on the job, Griffin, in his first year, had been elected to the post.

There was no denying the fact that it suited him. To begin with, he was already on intimate terms with every theatre manager and stage-doorkeeper in North Bromwich, and was used to dealing with the susceptibilities of theatrical people. Again, he had plenty of money, a circumstance that would help him in the preliminaries, which were expensively conducted in the local Bodega and other bars and restaurants. Also, it gave Griffin something to do; for the life of the student in brewing

was of the leisurely and somnolent character that one would naturally associate with malt liquors, and most of his time had previously been spent sprawling in a deep basket chair in the Common Room, playing an occasional languid game of poker, or jingling sovereigns in his pocket while he waited for the results of racing in the evening papers.

At the annual meeting, which Edwin had not been sufficiently interested to attend, there had been the usual difficulty in selecting a member from the unknown quantities of the first year, and Griffin, full of resource, had suggested Edwin, who was straightway elected, and summoned to attend the deliberations that followed. His election caused a good deal of amusement to his friends, and particularly Martin, who preserved an aristocratic contempt for this vulgar theatrical business, and W.G., who prophesied Edwin's conversion into a thorough-going blood; but it introduced him to a new and bewildering society in which he met a number of men of his own faculty who had already become impressive at a distance.

Such were the brothers Wade, the elder unapproachable in his final year, the younger of an elegance surpassing that of Harrop. Such was Freddie St Aubyn, a slight and immaculate figure with fair hair and moustache, and the most carefully cultivated reputation for elegant dissipation in North Bromwich. This Byronic person had already suffered the pangs of a long intrigue with the *première danseuse* in a musical comedy company, on whom he was reputed to have spent money and passion lavishly but without the least suggestion of grossness.

In addition to this he was a poet; that is to

say, he had published two volumes of verse that were so eclectic as to be out of print. At the present time he had stuck midway in his medical career pending the issue of his unhappy passion; and presented the unusual spectacle of a 'chronic,' not by force of incompetence, but by choice. In point of fact, he was an unconscious survival from the nineties, and the lady of his choice resembled a creation of Beardsley more than any type commonly known to nature. Edwin was impressed, for the writer of the exhausted *Poems of Passion* was the first poet that he had met in the flesh. Naturally, St Aubyn's attitude towards the first-year man was a little patronising; but Edwin found his mixture of cynicism and melancholy enchanting, and was particularly impressed when Freddie, languidly supporting his sorrows in one of the Common Room easy-chairs, offered him a fill from his pipe.

'Oh, by the way, there's opium in it,' he said casually.

Visions of Coleridge and de Quincey invaded Edwin's mind. He stopped filling his pipe.

'Opium? Why on earth do you put opium in it?'

'It is an aid to the imagination,' said Freddie, 'and it deadens pain.'

'Mental pain,' he added significantly, after a pause. 'For that alcohol is useless. I've tried it.'

'I think I'll have some of my own, if you don't mind,' said Edwin.

'I quite agree with you. It would be much wiser,' said St Aubyn. 'Luckily you have no need for it. *Facilis descensus Averni.*'

From that day forward Edwin was always eagerly searching the face and the pupils of Freddie for

any symptoms of opium poisoning. He never found any; and W.G., to whom he confided this thrilling incident, assured him that there was nothing in it, that Freddie had probably never smoked opium in his life, and that the whole thing was nothing more than one of the poses that this gentleman adopted for shocking the youthful and bourgeois. The impressive Freddie, according to W.G., was a damned anæmic waster. If only it had not been for the exhausted *Poems of Passion*, Edwin might have agreed with him.

The solemn meetings of the panto-night committee engaged Edwin three afternoons a week. As a congregation of amazing bloods they were enthralling but as business gatherings they were more remarkable still. They were held in the saloon bar of a modern public house, all palatial mahogany, red plush and plate-glass, called the White Horse; and the principal business of the day was the consumption of hot whisky with sugar and slices of lemon in it, during which Griffin, armed with a conspicuous note-book, reported on his activities, which appeared mainly to be social.

'On Thursday,' he would say, 'I took Mary Loraine to lunch at the Grand Midland, and she said. . . .' or 'I saw Tommy Fane in his dressing-room the other night, and he said: 'Look here, old boy.' ' ' Apparently all Griffin's theatrical friends called him 'old boy.' The effect of these narrations on Griffin would be so exhausting that he found it necessary to order more whisky all round. The manager himself would bring it in; a brilliant gentleman named Juniper with red baggy cheeks the laxness of which was compensated by a waxed moustache that stuck out on either side as if a skewer had transfixed them. To Griffin this

magnificent creature was most decorous; for the White Horse was one of Astill's houses, and Griffin had taken the trouble to inform him that the great Sir Joseph was his uncle. In spite of, rather than as a result of these meetings, the panto-night arranged itself. The date was fixed, the bouquets and presents purchased, the announcements in the papers that warned any patrons of pantomime that on this particular night they could not hope to see a normal performance, inserted. Griffin, in the Common Room, became a centre of feverish importance, and even Edwin, in spite of the superciliousness of Martin, and the rough chaff of W.G., caught a little of the reflected glamour.

Edwin now had to face the ordeal of announcing the approach of panto-night to his father. If he were to see the thing through, as was his duty as a member of the committee, it would be quite impossible for him to catch the last train to Halesby, which left North Bromwich at nine-thirty, except on Thursday and Saturday night. Mr Ingleby, hearing, saw the pit gaping beneath Edwin's feet. 'You didn't mention this to me before. . . . I suppose you have had to spend quite a lot of time at these committee meetings? I think it was rather unwise of you to undertake it in your first year. . . . There's only four months before your examination.'

'Oh, I think the exam will be all right,' said Edwin airily.

'I don't like to hear you speak like that, Edwin,' said his father. 'Over-confidence is a dangerous thing.'

'But it wouldn't be any better pretending that I didn't think it was all right, surely?'

'Well, humility is a great virtue.'

'Not any greater than honesty.'

'It's all very well to talk about honesty; but it would have been more honest, wouldn't it? if you'd told me that'—he hesitated—'*this* was going on.'

'There you are. . . . That's the whole point. If I told you everything you wouldn't sleep for imagining things that hadn't happened. It's the thing that's worried me ever since I was at school. If you're absolutely honest with other people, life simply isn't worth living, because they don't understand it. It isn't done. I've come to the conclusion, father, that the only thing that really matters is to be honest with yourself.'

'If you can trust yourself——'

'Well, I think I can. . . . And I wish you'd believe in it.'

'I do, Edwin. Only naturally I'm anxious. You're a child. Where is this . . . this performance held?'

'At the Queen's Theatre this year.'

'Well, I suppose that is better than a music hall.'

His father's prejudice against the Music Halls, or, as they were then beginning to be called, Theatres of Varieties, was an old story. Edwin could hardly resist the temptation of telling him that the performers in the pantomime were nearly all music-hall artistes, but Mr Ingleby saved him, by asking him where he intended to sleep.

'Oh, I expect W.G. will give me a shake-down in his digs.'

'I suppose,' said Mr Ingleby, with a shade of anxiety, 'that Brown is also on the committee——'

The idea of the honest W.G. as a member of this constellation of bloods tickled Edwin. He now wished to goodness he'd never told his father

of W.G.'s family differences and of his lucky double on the Lincoln and National.

'Oh, no, old W.G.'s far too sober for this sort of thing.'

It was an unfortunate word.

'Sober?' repeated Mr Ingleby. 'Well, I suppose you will have to go; but I do hope——'

He didn't say what he hoped; but Edwin knew, and was content to leave it at that.

III

The great day came, and Edwin found, as some compensation for the scoffing of W G. and the superciliousness of Martin and Maskew, that his position was really one of some importance. All the first-year men, even the immaculate Harrop, had decided to go to the theatre, and up to the last minute Edwin was busy selling tickets. He had asked W.G. to put him up, and W.G., as a matter of form, had consented. 'I don't suppose I shall see you after midnight, my son,' he said. With his usual thoroughness in everything that he attempted, W.G. had determined to make a night of it. 'It will do me good to make a damned fool of myself for once in a way,' he said, 'if it's only for the sake of realising it afterwards . . .'

They put in a hard afternoon's work together first, and then he and Edwin and Maskew went together to W.G.'s rooms to change. They were all rather excited, and W.G. carried a bottle of whisky in each of his coat pockets, the first of which was broached as an aperitif while they were changing. In less than an hour they emerged, W.G. attired as nearly as convention would allow

him, in the manner of his woaded ancestry: a splendid cave-man with lowering black brows and hairy arms like those of a gorilla, a disguise that only called for a little accentuation of his natural characteristics to be made effective; Maskew, again in character, as a Restoration cavalier; and Edwin in the modest guise of Pierrot. In the foyer of the theatre they met Martin, who had driven down in a hansom from Alvaston clothed in six feet of baby linen, with a feeding bottle round his neck. The stalls were already full of a carnival crowd of students, and the rest of the house was crowded with spectators who had come to enjoy the rag, and other unfortunate people who had entered in ignorance of the festival and the fact that their form of entertainment was to be changed for one night only.

There, among the crowd, Edwin found Griffin, a fleshy and unsubtle Mephistopheles, the Mephistopheles of Gounod, not of Goethe, and Freddie St Aubyn, romantically pale in a wig of black curls that he had procured for his presentation of Byron. Freddie, in the interests of verisimilitude, had even shaved his moustache.

Only the earlier part of the performance remained in Edwin's memory. The rest of it was no more to him than a brilliant haze, from which single moments of wild picturesqueness detached themselves: as when he had a vision of a prehistoric man armed with a waving whisky bottle for a club and feebly restrained by a flushed cavalier, flown with insolence and wine, storming his way through the surging crowd in front of the stalls bar and planting his feet upon the counter; or of the same barbarian, gently armed by a tactful manager in evening dress, putting his weapon to the usages of peace and

friendliness by uncorking it and offering its contents to a firm but good-humoured policeman.

'What a splendid fellow W.G. is,' Edwin thought to himself. 'Splendid . . . splendid . . . magnificent.' And while he was thinking this, a sombre poet with shining eyes drew him aside and confessed to him, almost with tears, that all this brilliance and colour and life meant nothing to him compared with the memory of the Beardsley lady, whose ankles were so thin that they might be spanned with his little finger. 'As light as a feather,' said the poet, 'gossamer . . . swansdown . . . all soul. Of course, old fellow, I know that you can understand. I shouldn't talk like this to any other person in the world.'

And Edwin understood, and realised the justice of the poet's choice of a confidant so sympathetically that he was spurred to confidences on his own part. 'You see, I happen to be a poet myself,' he said, and to prove it he felt bound to recite a sonnet that he had composed a year or two before at St Luke's. A magnificent sonnet it seemed to him, perhaps more magnificent for the accompaniment of a song in waltz rhythm by the theatre orchestra. It was flattering to find that Byron agreed with him as to its excellence; but while the poet was pressing his hand in congratulatory brotherhood, and Edwin was just deciding to recite it all over again, the sinister figure of Mephistopheles appeared and parted them, telling him that Miss Marie Loraine was now singing the last verse of her song and that in two minutes it would be his duty to present her with a bouquet and a pair of silver hair-brushes. Still reciting the most telling lines of his sonnet, he was conducted by Mephistopheles through the manager's office, where a young lady who, in her inviting softness,

resembled Miss Wheeler, was counting the counterfoils of tickets, and through a subterranean passage with the welcome chill of a catacomb, to the wings of the theatre, where a florid bouquet was thrust into his hands.

It struck Edwin that the scent of the flowers was of a suffocating heaviness, until he realised that the overpowering perfume of which he was aware proceeded not from the bouquet but from the scents and powders of a bevy of creatures of unnatural loveliness who stood waiting in the wings. They were the ladies of the chorus, and the nature of their costume would have given them an excuse for shivering; but they did not appear to be conscious of the heat that throbbed in Edwin's brain. The scent and the proximity of such a huge expanse of naked flesh excited him. At this moment all his awkwardness seemed to have vanished. He could not believe that he was the same person who had blushed at the mere contact of the American girl's overall, or sat speechless in the presence of Miss Wheeler at the Dousita. His old modesty seemed to him to have been a ridiculous and inexcusable folly; for, at the moment, he would have welcomed the prospect of making the most shameless advances to any one of these houris in competition with any man of his acquaintance. With the air of a Sultan he surveyed them, deciding to which of those blossoms the handkerchief should be thrown.

'Now get along with you,' said the stage-manager, pushing him forward.

He gripped the presents in his hands, and treading on air, advanced on to the stage, where Miss Marie Lorraine was kissing her hands to the stalls. The stage was very big, and sloped in such a way that

he felt his feet impelled towards the footlights; but, being determined that he would accomplish his mission with dignity, Edwin steered a steady, if resilient, course. In front of him he saw a creature before whose elegance and beauty the beauty of the chorus was as nothing. She stood waiting for him and smiled. For a moment Edwin faced the auditorium, a vast and dark abyss in which not a single face was to be seen. It gave him a sudden fright to think that so many thousands of unseen eyes were fixed upon the patch of limelight in which he stood. He pulled himself together. This was the moment, he thought, in which it was for him to make some speech worthy of the bewildering loveliness that stood before him.

'Go on,' said the impatient voice of Mephistopheles in the wings. 'Buck up.'

'Miss Lorraine,' said Edwin, with a flourish, 'I have the honour of——' The middle of his sentence was broken by a crash and a tremendous peal of laughter from the unseen thousands. The younger Wade, arrayed in the panoply of a Roman legionary and balanced upon the parapet of the stage box, had fallen with a clash of armour into the big drum. Edwin thrust the bouquet and the hair-brushes into the arms of Miss Loraine, herself convulsed with laughter. With a terrific draught the curtain swept down.

'Splendid,' said the voice of Mephistopheles.

The rest of the evening was more confused than ever. He remembered a vision of this surpassing beauty standing in the wings in a long silk wrapper that her dresser had thrown over her shoulders, and thanking him for his presentation. To Edwin the moment seemed the beginning of a passionate romance. He remembered other moments in the

auditorium, in which W.G. and Maskew figured. He remembered the taste of a glass of Benedictine, a liqueur that he had never tasted before, that Maskew gave him to pull him together again after his exertions on the stage. He remembered a flashing of lights, an uproar, a free-fight, and the singing of 'God Save the Queen.' And then he found himself a member of a small but distinguished brotherhood streaming at a tremendous rate up the wide street that led towards the Prince's Hospital. All of them were medicals, and most of them his seniors. Freddie St Aubyn, the Wade brothers, W.G., and Maskew were among them. Out of the main road they passed singing into the meaner streets that surrounded the hospital: miserable streets with low houses and courts clustered on either side, from the upper windows of which astonished working men and women in their night-dresses put out their heads to look at the vocal procession. Opposite the portico of the hospital was a cab rank on which a solitary hansom was standing with the horse asleep in the shafts and the driver taking his rest inside. The sight appeared to arouse the fighting instincts of the elder Wade.

'Good God,' he said, with indignation, 'here's a cab. What the hell does the fellow think he's doing here at this time of night? He must be drunk. Look at it!'

His brother, who could carry his liquor better, tried to persuade him to leave the cab alone; but before any one knew what was happening, he had thrown himself on it and turned the whole affair upside down in the road. Edwin heard a crash of splintered glass; he saw the cab on its side and the sleepy horse with its legs in the air. He thought:

'Good God! What has happened?' And the next thing he saw was a red-faced cabman, buttoned up to his ears, crawling out of the wreckage and cursing fluently at Wade, who stared for a moment, dazed, at the havoc his strength had created, and then bolted for the shelter of the hospital. The cabman, now thoroughly awakened, bolted after him. Edwin glowed with admiration for Wade's achievement. It was the deed of a Titan, a splendid Berserker. The cabby had burst through the concourse on the hospital steps, thirsting for the blood of Wade, who, by this time, was lying quietly on a hooded stretcher swathed in bandages and quite unrecognisable. A house surgeon in a white overall confronted the cabman. The hospital porters in uniform stood solemnly at his elbow. The house surgeon was assuring the cabby that he was drunk: the cabby telling the lot of them exactly what he thought of them.

'Take hold of this fellow,' said the house surgeon to the porters, 'and hold him while I get a stomach pump.' The porters, specially qualified for dealing with midnight drunks, obeyed. There was a splendid struggle in which the foaming cabby was pitched out into the road, ——ing their ——ing eyes to Hell. The bandaged Wade was carried solemnly upstairs on his stretcher and brought round with whisky in the house surgeon's room, a chamber full of Olympian card-players, pickled with cigar-smoke and the fumes of alcohol. Some one, it was the cavalier, began to play the piano. Edwin seized the opportunity to recite his sonnet, until W.G. laid a monstrous hand on his mouth.

That vision ended, and to it succeeded one of cool, deserted streets with far too many kerb-stones

for Edwin's liking, and then the dishevelled sitting-room in W.G.'s digs in which they had dressed with a pale gas-jet hissing and flaring and a momentary impression of W.G. asking him where he'd put the damned corkscrew. Edwin remembered rising to a brilliant extreme of wit. 'Am I your corkscrew's keeper?' he said; and while he was explaining at length the aptness of his mot W.G. knocked the neck off the bottle with his poker, eclipsing any possible verbal brilliance.

In the middle of the night Edwin woke and staggered in the dark to the washhand-stand, where he drank a draught of water, so cool and sweet as to be astonishing, until he remembered that it had possibly come from the mountains beyond Felindre. W.G. was snoring heavily on the bed that he had just left. W.G.'s snoring got on his nerves so that he had to prod him in the ribs and wake him, a proceeding that W.G. seemed unjustly to resent.

'I say, W.G.,' he said, 'do you think I was drunk?'

'Drunk?' said W.G. 'Good God, you didn't wake me to ask me that? You'll know all right in the morning.'

Edwin only knew that his head was splitting and that he was hellishly cold.

CHAPTER IV

SCIENCE

I

W.G.'s prophecy that Edwin would know all about it in the morning proved correct; but it was some consolation to him to know that he shared the experience with his friends. All the next day he went about his work with Maskew feeling a little light-headed, and a peculiar weakness in the legs made him disinclined for any exertion that could be avoided. Maskew recovered himself more easily; but W.G., who never did anything by halves, solemnly embarked on a 'bust' that lasted for a whole week.

This defection disgusted Maskew, who, in his hard, capable way, believed in moderation in all things—even in vice. He considered W.G.'s conduct 'a bit thick'; principally because he was deprived of his company in the dissecting room; but to Edwin the big man's debauch seemed in some ways heroic and in keeping with his titanic physical nature: a spectacle rather for awe than for reproof. It was even impressive to see W.G. returning like a giant refreshed with vice, throwing his huge energies into the pursuits that he had abandoned as readily as he had lately squandered them in an atmosphere of patchouli. In this line Edwin would have found it constitutionally impossible to compete with W.G., but, for all that, he could not deny that he felt better, more confident, and more complete for the pantomime experience.

It even flattered him to find himself regarded as something of a blood by the humbler members of his year who had witnessed his adventure on the Queen's Theatre stage, though he could not conceal from himself the fact that Martin, more absorbed than ever in blameless but exacting relations with the eligible young ladies of Alvaston, was a little supercilious as to his attainments.

With the approach of the summer and the first examination he found little time for anything but work. The preparation for the exam. was so much of a scramble that he had no time to realise the imaginative significance of the subjects in which he was engaged. He did not guess that the little fat professor of Physics who lectured so dryly on the elements of his science was actually employing his leisure in the tremendous adventure of weighing the terrestrial globe, or that certain slender aerials stretched like the web of a spider from a mast at the top of the university buildings were actually receiving the first lispings of wireless telegraphy, an achievement to which that bearded dreamer, the Principal, had devoted twenty years of his life.

To Edwin there was nothing intrinsically romantic in Chemistry or Physics. His mind could not conceive that science was a minute and infinitely laborious conquest of the properties of matter. Atoms and Molecules and the newly-dreamed Electrons, still trembling in the realms of imponderable speculation, were no more to him than abstractions unrelated to the needs of practical human life. They were only facts to be learned by rote, symbols to be memorised and grouped together on paper like the letters in an algebraic calculation; and the whole of this potentially romantic experience was clouded by his own headachy distaste for the

gaseous smells of the laboratory: the choking yellow fumes of chlorine that escaped from the glass cupboards in which it was manufactured, and the less tolerable, if more human, odour of Sulphuretted Hydrogen, in an air that was desiccated by the blue flames of half a hundred Bunsen burners. These two subjects were nothing more than an arid desert of facts relating to dead matter through which he had to fight his way, and he hated them.

In comparison with them, Biology was something of an oasis. Here, at any rate, he had to deal with life, a mystery more obvious and less academic. The contemplation of its lower forms, such as the Amœba, a tiny speck of dreamy protoplasm stretching out its languid tentacles, living its remote and curiously detached life with no aims beyond that of bare mysterious existence, filled him with a strange awe. The laboratory in which these researches were conducted, was high and airy and not associated with any unpleasant smells except at the season when the class were engaged upon the dissection of the hideous dog-fish. It had even its aspects of beauty in the person of the fair American in her dark overalls; and for this reason, if for no other, Edwin found himself becoming most proficient in his knowledge of the subject.

In the middle of the summer the examination came. Maskew was an easy first, and carried off the Queen's scholarship for the year; Edwin came second with a first-class, which, even if it didn't satisfy himself, was enough to make his father enthusiastic; Martin ambled through with an ease that challenged Edwin's respect, and W.G., horribly intense and determined through all the week of the exam., scraped through by virtue of sheer bulldog tenacity. The result of the examination

did Edwin good if only by convincing him that Maskew, for all his suburban flashiness and his inferior general education, had a better head than his own. Like the excellent man of business that he was, Maskew did not rest upon his oars: the week after the examination, and the first of the long vacation, found him and W.G. back in the dissecting room, plugging into anatomy, the next year's principal subject, and Edwin saw at once that if he were to keep pace with his rival he would have to forgo the months of summery leisure to which he had looked forward in the vacation. Martin was playing tennis in Ireland, and so he found himself thrown once more into the society of these two.

It was a pleasant time, for their leisure was their own and there were no lectures to tie them to their work. They did a great deal of their reading in W.G.'s rooms, full of easy-chairs, and wreathed in tobacco smoke that escaped through a French window into a tiny garden plot green and pleasant under the white Midland sky, and this room became a haven of escape from the burning brick pavements in which Edwin and his friends would work together without strain, talking of the future and of W.G.'s romantic past, and stabilising their own ideas on the uncertainties of sex: a problem that so far had meant very little to Edwin, but which W.G. was not in a position to ignore.

'You know, it's damned funny,' he said, 'but when you get to know more about things, when you've done some anatomy and that, you begin to think of sex in a different light. It knocks all the mystery out of it, and I'm sure that's a jolly sound thing. Good Lord, when I think of the ignorance with which I started on this sort of

thing! Finding out everything by experiment, you know. . . . Why, if I'd had a short course of anatomy before I left school I should have been saved a lot of rotten experiments that didn't do me or any one else any good. I'd have been a damned sight cleaner-minded than I ever was. A medical training's a jolly good thing in that way: shows you exactly where you are instead of letting you go fumbling about in the dark.'

'Knocks all the poetry out of it though,' said Maskew.

'Poetry be damned,' said W.G. seriously, 'there's a good deal too much of your poetry about it. Poetry and mystery and a lot of bunkum like that . . . Male and female created He them. I don't particularly admire the method. I think he made rather a better job of the amœba. Think how much simpler it would be to split open a chunk of protoplasm instead of having to make a ridiculous fool of yourself if you want to propagate your species. Still, there it is, and the sooner you realise exactly what it means and what it's all about, the less you worry your head about it.'

'Well, of course, if you're going to treat it in that light you're going to knock all the pleasure out of life——' Maskew protested.

'Oh, you're a sensualist,' said W.G. 'The main thing that I have against it is that it wastes valuable time.' He became scornful. 'Think of all these rotten fellows who spend their days writing books on sexual problems, analysing their rotten little sensations in detail and gloating over mysteries of sex. It's only their ignorance that makes them like that. What they want is a thorough course of anatomy and a whack of practical experience to cure them; and if every one else had the same

sort of education there'd be no sale for their books.'

Edwin, listening to their sparring, remembered the library at St Luke's and a certain shelf of anatomical works that was always kept locked with a special key that Mr Leeming carried mysteriously on his watch-chain. On the whole, he agreed with W.G. and his preferences for the methods of the Amœba's parthenogenesis. He wondered, however, if the kind of education that W.G. advocated would have scotched the production of such works as *Romeo and Juliet* or the love poems of Shelley.

'It would be rather rotten if you did away with love, W.G.,' he said.

'Oh, I'm not talking about love,' said W.G. 'I'm talking about a fellow's ordinary physical needs. Being in love is not the same thing as that.'

'It is usually,' said the cynical Maskew.

'It's all a ridiculous mix-up,' said Edwin. 'Thank God it doesn't worry us.'

II

With the beginning of the new year these delicious hours of leisure disappeared. Edwin and his friends, with the assurance of second-year men, became the real possessors of the dissecting room. Anatomy and physiology now absorbed all their time, and the leisurely interest in the first subject, which had been subsidiary in the first year, was now a matter of academical life and death. From the simple anatomical details of the upper and lower extremities that he had dissected with Martin in the year before, he passed to the more vital regions of the human body: the thorax, the

abdomen, and the head and neck. He still attended the polished course of lectures on anatomy that the Dean delivered in the theatre; but this process he was forced to regard as a waste of time, since the Dean's presentation of the subject did not differ greatly from that of any text-book of anatomy, and the Dean's personality, which curiously resembled that of his cousin Martin, was too aristocratically remote ever to seem real.

In the dissecting room, on the other hand, he became acquainted and fascinated with the first of his medical instructors who had aroused his imagination. This was the chief demonstrator of Anatomy, Robert Moon, or, more familiarly, Bobby, a figure of romantic picturesqueness. He was tall and inclined to be fat, he always wore a black frock-coat, and his serious face, which was of a size and pallor that his surname suggested, was crowned by an erect crop of black and curly hair. In Edwin's first year he had always seemed to him a strange and distant figure, walking slowly up and down the dissecting room, on the occasions when he emerged from the dark chamber which he inhabited in the corner near the door, like a fat and rather sinister spider.

He rarely spoke: when he did so it was with a broad, north country accent and the most extraordinary deliberation and formality in his choice of words. With the men in the second year he possessed an enormous reputation not only for his exhaustive knowledge of anatomy, by the side of which the Dean's attainments seemed merely those of a dilettante, but also for his excellence as a coach. Edwin and his two friends became sedulous attendants at his tutorials, where, standing in immobile dignity behind one of the zinc

dissecting-room tables in front of an appropriate background of blackboard, and surrounded by a ring of second-year students, who came to sit at his feet voluntarily, like the disciples of a Greek philosopher, he would demonstrate the details of some ragged anatomical part that had lain in spirit until it was of the colour and consistency of leather.

In Bobby's demonstrations there was neither imagination nor romance: they were merely fascinating in virtue of the amazing exactitude of the detail which his brain had acquired through long familiarity with the dismembered fragments of humanity. There was nothing in the way of minute observation that could escape him, and his questions were so searching and unexpected that even Maskew, who had himself a prodigious memory for minute detail and could carry the letter of a text-book in his head, was constantly floored by them. It was a magnificent stimulus to Edwin; for it became a kind of game to master a part so thoroughly that Bobby could not stump him.

By this time he was so used to railway travelling that between the morning discussion of the progress of the war that had just broken out in South Africa, and the appearance of halfpenny papers, that multiplied like greenfly in this heated atmosphere, he could read his text-books of anatomy in a crowded carriage without disturbance apart from the natural curiosity that a vision of luridly coloured diagrams awakened in the minds of his fellow passengers, and particularly the bank clerk, who thirsted in a way that W.G. would have approved for technical instruction in the matter of certain organs. Edwin prepared himself for the demonstrator's tutorials as rigorously as if he had been approaching a vital

examination; he spent long hours in his bedroom, utterly heedless of his wide prospect of wintry fields, thinking of nothing but his collection of bleached bones, now carefully marked with coloured chalks to show the origins and insertions of muscles, and particularly those intricate fretted plates that are joined to form the fragile casket of the human skull.

So engrossed was he in absorbing the mere details of their physical form that his mind had no room for other speculations of the kind that had impressed him in the days of his first acquaintance with anatomy. It never struck him that the articulated skull which grinned at him from his mantelpiece when he woke each morning, had once contained the convolutions of a human brain: a mass of pulpy matter that had been the origin of strange complications of movement and feeling and thought, the storehouse of memories, the spring of passions and the theatre of dreams. He did not even know if the skull were that of a man or a woman. To him it was no more than an assembly of dry bones, intricate in their relations with one another, pierced by the foramina of bewildering nerves and blood-vessels, all of which must be visualised and stored and remembered within the limits of another structure of the same kind—the sutures and eminences of which he could feel with his own fingers when he rubbed his puzzled head.

He used to go back to Mr Moon's tutorials convinced that he knew all that was to be known of the subject in hand, and then Bobby, in his slow Lancashire voice, with broadened 'a's and blunt 'u's, would put to him some leisurely question that showed him that he knew nothing. Very decorously and slowly these questions would be asked; and since the

answers were concerned with the dryest and most exact of physical facts, guessing was of no help to him and silence the only refuge of the ignorant. No display either of knowledge or ignorance had the least effect on Bobby Moon. His wide and dreamy face showed no emotion on the discovery of either. On very rare occasions he would descend to a kind of ponderous verbal humour, slow and elephantine, like the humour of Beethoven; but even in these moments his face showed no signs of emotion, and he would pass on without waiting for any recognition of his joke to the next lethargic question. 'Mr Harrop,' he would say slowly, 'what is the fotty pod of Hovers?' And Harrop, sitting on a high stool that showed his variegated socks to perfection, would reply that the fatty pad of Havers was a small cushion of fat set in the head of the femur to lubricate the hollow of the acetabulum.

The picturesque figure of Moon soon began to dominate Edwin's impressions of the dissecting room. There was something provocative in the remoteness of this black and solitary form from all the concerns of human life. Edwin conceived him to be a kind of cerebral abstraction, no man, but an advanced text-book of anatomy; curiously endowed with the powers of locomotion and speech but bereft of any human characteristic. It amazed him to discover, in the end, that Bobby Moon was nothing of the sort, but a creature of the most delicate human tenderness, so sensitive to the appeals of beauty and humanity that he had been forced to adopt the impassive mask that was all that his pupils knew of him from an instinct of self protection.

It happened in this way. During the early part

of his second year Edwin had become conscious of a new figure in the dissecting room, that of a man named Boyce, a student with a brilliant reputation who had managed in some inexplicable way to fail in his first examination and be left behind by the other men of his year. He was a tall, fair creature, with a long face and small, very blue eyes. The society of Alvaston had made him friendly with Martin, from whom Edwin's new relations were gradually separating him. The only characteristic that Edwin had so far noticed in Boyce was an almost literary fluency in the use of foul language which left even Harrop gasping. Boyce was working alone on a thorax a few tables away from Edwin. He was a neat and laborious dissector, and Edwin had been tempted to admire the skill with which he had defined the network of blood-vessels, the system of coronary arteries and veins, with which the human heart is enmeshed. Boyce was evidently far less unapproachable than Edwin had imagined, and while they were examining his dissection together they had not noticed the approach of Dr Moon, who had walked slowly to their table and stood gazing at the specimen through his moonlike pince-nez. They did not realise that he was near them until they heard his voice, slowly intoning a line of poetry. 'The heart,' he said: 'arras'd in purple like a house of kings. Are you acquainted with that line, Mr Boyce?'

'No, sir. Who wrote it?'

'A man named Francis Thompson. He was a medical student at Manchester, several years senior to me.'

'Oh, I know his name,' said Boyce. 'He is a friend of my father's.'

'A great poet,' said Bobby solemnly. 'A great

poet. The contemplation of mortality in this place should be full of poetical reflections. You see, this is the heart of a very old or a very dissolute man. The coronary arteries are stiff with atheroma.'

'I was thinking, sir,' said Edwin, encouraged, 'of the heart of Shelley that Trelawny was supposed to have picked out of the funeral pyre when the body was burned. His account says that only the heart was left. He gave it to Hunt, didn't he? But you'd think the heart would be burned more easily——'

'Yes. . . . It's an unlikely story. Shelley's heart'—he looked up dreamily at the ceiling—'Shelley's heart. . . . It's a strange reflection.' And he moved away, his big head still in the air and his hands behind his back.

'I say,' said Edwin, 'I'd no idea Bobby was like that. You wouldn't associate him with poetry, would you? He seems such an awfully matter-of-fact chap. Dry bones, you know.'

Boyce laughed. 'Oh, you don't know Bobby. Nobody does here except my father. He's an incurable sentimentalist. He lives an awfully lonely sort of life in some digs up in Alvaston. His mind's crammed with poetry and old music and a lot of ethnological lumber. Do you know, he's about the biggest authority in England on prehistoric man?'

'I hadn't the least idea. I imagined he dreamed of nothing but bones and soft parts.'

'You would. . . . But he's a wonderful chap really. Are you keen on poetry?

'Of course I am.'

'There's no "of course" about it. I don't imagine that your friends Brown and Maskew are

particularly interested in it. My guvnor's by way of being a poet, you know. Bobby's awfully keen on his work. Do you know it?'

Edwin was ashamed to say he did not.

'Oh, I'm not in the least surprised,' said Boyce. 'He's not appreciated, you know, except by other poets, like this fellow Thompson. I think he's rather good, as a matter of fact, quite apart from the fact that he's my father. If you'll come up to our place some day I can show you a lot of interesting things in his library: first editions and things like that. I'd no idea that you were keen on them.'

The tone implied such an appreciation of Edwin's hectic past as typified by his solitary appearance on the stage of the Queen's Theatre that he hastened to deny the impeachment. He was tremendously pleased to have struck a man like Boyce, who went on to talk about music, of which Edwin knew nothing, and exuded an easy atmosphere of culture, of a kind that he envied, without ever losing sight of the fact that Edwin had come to him in rather a questionable shape. Edwin was thrilled to think that he had reached the threshold of a new and exciting friendship which made his association with Brown and Maskew seem commonplace and shabby; but he was far too shy to force himself on Boyce, and so the acquaintance remained for many months at the exact stage in which it had begun, and he had to be content with the sudden insight that Boyce had given him into the hidden, romantic qualities of Dr Moon.

Sometimes, while he was scrubbing his hands with carbolic soap, the only thing that really banished the smell of the dissecting room from his fingers, he would hear Boyce discussing

music, and particularly the work of Tschaikowsky, whose sixth symphony had just inflamed his imagination, with Mr Moon in his gloomy bunk, and he would go on washing his hands until they were ridged and sodden in the hope of hearing what they were saying or even of entering into their conversation, until W.G. would come along and drag him off to Joey's, asking him what the hell he was dawdling about. Then Edwin would be almost ashamed of W.G.'s company, and hated himself for it, since he knew in his heart of hearts that, even if he were a Philistine, W.G. was one of the best and soundest fellows on earth.

The friendship with Boyce, however, was bound to come. It began with the formation of a small literary society, that had been originated by certain of the third year men with whom Boyce was acquainted, and which held its meetings in the newly-opened smoking room that adjoined Dr Moon's chamber of horrors. Papers were read every fortnight, and discussions followed in which Edwin had scarcely dared to take part, but Boyce was a polished and fluent protagonist. In the end, when the first enthusiasms of the society, to which Brown and Maskew, naturally enough, did not belong, had been spent, Edwin was asked to read a paper. He chose for his subject Browne's *Religio Medici*, a work with which this medical audience seemed strangely unacquainted. The paper was a success, and at the end of the meeting Boyce accosted him friendlily and asked him why he had never been up to see his father's books. Edwin withheld the obvious reply that the invitation had not been pressed although he had never ceased to think of it; and Boyce at once suggested that they should go up to Alvaston together that evening. 'We can

put you up for the night if that will be more convenient,' he said.

They walked up together under the high, frosty sky, talking of poetry, of all the beautiful things that they had worshipped in common without knowing it. It seemed strange to Edwin that they should have worked side by side for a couple of years and scarcely spoken to each other when all the time they had so many delights that might have been shared. The unlocking of this closed and secret chamber of his heart gave him a strange feeling of elation and made the world suddenly beautiful. The hard and wintry pavement seemed curiously smooth and resilient; the roadway ran in masterly and noble curves, the black branches of plane-trees and laburnums, even the pointed gables of the smug suburban villas seemed to take on a new and piercing beauty against the starry sky, and they swung along together as triumphant in their ecstasy of youth as if indeed they were treading on the stars.

'What a topping night,' said Boyce. 'God . . . look at Vega!' He waved his long arms and quoted :—

> 'Or search the brow of eve, to catch
> In opal depths the first faint beat
> Of Vega's fiery heart. . . .'

'Whose is that?'

'My guvnor's. He's a tremendous chap on astronomy.'

'It's damned good,' said Edwin, thrilling.

'Not bad, is it? He's a very sound man, the guvnor. I think you'd like him.'

But when they reached the Boyces' house they

found that the poet was not at home. In place of him Edwin was introduced to a mild and beautiful figure with a soft voice who turned out to be Boyce's mother. She had her son's soft blue eyes, and spoke to him with such caressing tenderness that Edwin was seized with a sudden feeling of aching emptiness for the memory of his own mother, of whom, so potent is the anodyne of time, he had scarcely thought for more than a year.

Haynes presented Edwin with a high social recommendation. 'A friend of Denis Martin's,' he said. Mrs Boyce smiled on him.

'Look here,' said her son, 'I'm afraid we can't very well go into the guvnor's study. He hates any one invading it when he's not there. Let's go upstairs to my own room and talk.'

Edwin had a passing vision of the forbidden chamber, the flanks of a grand piano in which a reflection of firelight glowed red, and endless shelves of gilt-lettered books. The rest of the house seemed to him rather untidy, as if it were no more than a dry chrysalis protecting the central beauty of the poet's room ; but he had not time to see much following in the rear of Boyce's long-legged progress up the stairs. He found himself, at last, in a small attic with a gable window that framed the starry sky : the kind of room that satisfied all his own ideals of comfort and seclusion.

Boyce was proud and willing to exhibit his treasures. They showed a curious mixture of the schoolboy, represented by photographic groups of cricket teams, glass cases of butterflies, and a tasseled Rugby cap, and the more mature intelligence that now possessed them. Edwin and he sat down opposite one another in a couple of easy-chairs, and talked and smoked incessantly all that

evening. They spoke of Wordsworth, the idol of Boyce's literary devotions, of Browning, whose claims to poetry he would not allow, and of Shenstone, whose name he had never met before. By this time Edwin was getting rather ashamed of his early admiration for Shenstone, and the fact that Boyce had never heard of the Pastoral Ballad confirmed him in his decision that the author was an acquaintance whom he had better drop. They went on to Francis Thompson—Dr Moon's quotation from the *Anthem of Earth* had sent Edwin searching for his works in the municipal library—and he now learned that this bewildering genius, who had once, like him, been a medical student, had actually slept in the room beneath his feet.

'He never qualified,' said Boyce dreamily, 'and yet medicine is a wonderful thing. I should think the fact that the medical man is always face to face with mortality'—he pointed to a suspended skeleton in the corner—'and all the other big fundamental things like birth and pain, ought to give him a sort of sense of proportion and make him sensitive to the beauties of life. Your friend, Sir Thomas Browne, is an example. Then there's Rabelais.'

'There are heaps of others,' said Edwin.

'Well, yes. . . . Keats.'

'Byron and Akenside,' Edwin supplied from the eighteenth century.

'I don't know the gentleman,' said Boyce.

'Well, then, Goldsmith and Crabbe. Crabbe's rather good, you know. And Shelley——'

Shelley?'

'Yes, Shelley walked a hospital when he was in London with Harriet.'

'I'd no idea of that,' said Boyce, 'but there's a modern fellow that the guvnor's rather keen on, named Bridges. Robert Bridges, who's a physician.'

'I've never heard of him.'

'No . . . he's not well known, but I believe he's pretty good.'

And so they talked on, deciding that the world was ripe for great poetical achievement, awed to think that perhaps they were living, without knowing it, in the beginning of a great age of literature; convinced, to a degree of enthusiasm, of the splendour and magnanimity of the calling that they had adopted; conscious—thrillingly conscious—of the fact that the whole world lay before them full of undreamed delights as mysterious and yet as clear as the wintry sky.

Edwin had to run for his train. He didn't mind running. On a night like this he felt that violent exercise was a mode of expressing the curious elation that his talk with Boyce, and his excitement in the new friendship that promised so many hours of happiness, had given him. At the gates of the station he paused to buy an evening paper. It contained the news of Buller's defeat at Colenso and the result of a cup-tie between North Bromwich Albion and Notts Forest, but he had no room in his mind for football or for this African war in which W.G., to the ruin of his future finances, was itching to enlist. Edwin's thoughts were of the great names and the great works of which he and Boyce had been talking. The newspaper lay folded on his knees; the flares of the black country swept past him in the night, unseen. He was not even aware of the other occupants of the carriage until he suddenly found himself staring straight into the eyes of his opposite, whom he recognised as Edward

Willis, the son of Walter Willis of the Great Mawne Furnaces.

All Aunt Laura's attempts, heroically made in the interests of social advancement, had so far failed to bring about a friendship between these two. Edwin, on his side, could never get out of his head an unreasonable prejudice against the Willises, the natural result of Aunt Laura's adulation of their wealth, and even a knowledge of his own humble origins had not affected his traditional distrust of people whom he regarded as flashy and self-made. In Edward Willis he found a creature even more shy than himself, and the very fact that Mrs Willis and Aunt Laura, putting their heads together, had decided to throw them into each other's arms, was enough to create an atmosphere of distrust and uneasiness. The sudden recognition in the railway carriage was merely an embarrassment. Edwin was startled into saying 'Hallo,' and Willis replied in exactly the same way; then both of them retired with precipitation to the cover of their evening newspapers, from which they listened to the conversation of a commercial traveller who was returning home from London and had all the latest and most authentic gossip on the South African situation.

'Mind you,' he said, 'they're wily fellows, these old Boers; we may not be up to their dirty tricks: I'm proud to say we aren't. We shouldn't be English if we were. But one thing, sir, you'll see in the end, and that is that dogged British pluck will come through. You mark my words.'

Edwin felt an overpowering impulse to say that dogged British pluck pretty obviously hadn't come through at Colenso; but Edward Willis's presence made him far too self-conscious to commit himself,

and at the next station the traveller and his friend picked up their bags and departed, breathing the word 'Buller' as if it were an incantation warranted to fortify and console. Edwin and Willis were alone.

When their silence had become altogether too ridiculous, Edwin plucked up his courage and said, 'Rotten thing this war.'

'I don't know,' said Willis. 'It's all right for my old man.'

'What do you mean?'

'Iron. . . . We're chock full of Government work for South Africa: gun-carriages and rifle barrels. You're doing medicine, aren't you?'

'Yes.'

'Lucky devil. You're learning to cure people while I'm learning to make things to kill them.'

He stared out of the window towards a patch of sky in which the glow of his father's furnaces pulsated as though it registered the beatings of a savage, fiery heart, and relapsed into gloomy silence. The tunnel swallowed them, and in a moment they pulled up at the Mawne Halt. Willis prepared to go. 'I say,' he said, 'we're giving a dance next week——' and hesitated.

'What for?' said Edwin, for want of something better.

'I don't know . . . unless it's to celebrate the Colenso casualties. I believe you're invited. I hope you'll come.'

'Thanks,' said Edwin. But Willis was gone.

CHAPTER V

ROMANCE

I

Mr Ingleby wanted to know why he was so late.

'I read a paper at the Literary Society,' he said, 'and then went back to Alvaston with a man named Boyce. He's a son of Arthur Boyce.'

'The auctioneer?' asked Mr Ingleby.

'No . . . the poet.'

Mr Ingleby's features showed a faint anxiety, as though he doubted if such an influence were healthy. 'Well, I hope your paper was a success,' he said.

'Oh, I think it went all right. Any letters?'

'Yes . . . two. Here they are.' He handed them to Edwin.

One of them was the invitation from Mawne. He showed it to his father.

'A dance——' said Mr Ingleby.

'Yes. . . . I suppose I'd better go.'

'Your Aunt Laura told me about it. If it won't interfere with your work, I don't see why you shouldn't.'

'I haven't any proper clothes. Evening dress, you know.'

'I suppose that is quite necessary,' said Mr Ingleby regretfully.

Edwin could see that the question of expense was troubling his father's mind. He wished to goodness he would say so outright, instead of looking vaguely distressed. It would be so much more satisfactory. As it was, he could only feel indefinitely

in the wrong, as if the dance were a piece of reckless and inexcusable levity in which he had no right to take a part. The dress suit, the acquisition of which had been anticipated with some satisfaction, now appeared to him in the terms of an accumulation of small change hardly earned in his father's dusty shop: as the outcome of penny-worths of Epsom Salts, sticks of liquorice, or teething powders. It was humiliating, and even distressing to realise that every single comfort or luxury that he enjoyed—even the prime necessities of life, had to be accumulated, literally scraped together from this incredibly humble source and by the personal exertions of this simple and pathetic person. With these conditions in his mind he could not bear accepting money from his father, the weight of his obligation was so overwhelming. Now he found it difficult to face the idea of a tailor's bill that might represent the profit on at least three days of small trading in the shop.

'I don't think I'd better go, father,' he said.

'It would be rather ungracious if you didn't, Edwin,' his father replied. 'It was extremely kind of the Willises to ask you. I think you'd better go and be measured to-morrow by Mr Jones.'

The idea of a Halesby tailor's cut was not inspiring and made Edwin inclined to press his refusal; but Mr Ingleby went on to explain that Mr Jones owed him a bill that he had begun to look upon as a bad debt, and that Edwin's dress suit would be a way of working it off. This circumstance made the order less shameful, except in so far as it applied to the hateful penury of Mr Jones, whom Edwin remembered as a man with a beard, as shabbily unlike a tailor's dummy as it was possible for a

man to be. The occurrence was unfortunate in another way; for such an addition to his wardrobe would almost certainly scotch the idea of asking for a dress allowance, a plan which had been maturing in his brain for some months and only needed a callous frame of mind for its performance.

Next evening, however, he went to see Mr Jones, who measured him obsequiously, and assured him that in the happy days before he was his own master, he had actually cut morning-coats for Sir Joseph Astill, a gentleman who was very difficult to fit on account of a slight . . . er . . . fullness in the figure. Edwin, primed by the observations of The Major in *To-Day*, was able to tell Mr Jones exactly what he wanted, and Mr Jones's manner, when he rubbed his hands over Edwin's instructions, did not suggest for a moment the fact of which Edwin was all the time aware: that this was not a *bona-fide* order, but a rather shabby way of making him pay a bill that he had scamped for a couple of years.

Stepping out of Mr Jones's melancholy shop, Edwin thanked heaven that his father had not wanted him to follow in his footsteps; for it seemed to him that the life of a struggling tradesman in a small town must be the most humiliating on earth. He was awfully sorry for all of them as he walked down the street and read their names on the boards above their windows. He had never quite realised their condition before he smelt the particular odour of lower middle-class poverty, vaguely suggestive of perambulators, aspidistras, and boiled mutton, that moved down the linoleum floored passage at the back of Mr Jones's shop.

In due course the clothes arrived. On the whole, Mr Jones had not done badly; but even so, Edwin was still scarcely qualified for the business in hand.

He had never learned to dance, and it was necessary to acquire this accomplishment in a little more than a week. At first he had decided to pull his courage together and approach Martin, whose eligibility compelled him to be an expert dancing man; but, at the last moment, he funked a confession that would expose such depths of social ignorance, and went instead to a certain Professor Beagle, who advertised classes in dancing and deportment at the hour of five on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, in the Queen's Assembly Rooms, next door to the theatre of the same name.

On the next Tuesday afternoon Edwin presented himself to Mr Beagle at the advertised hour. He found him alone sitting on a platform at the end of a long room that smelt of dust and moth-eaten rep curtains. When Edwin appeared at the other end of the room the professor dismounted, cleared his throat, clasped his hands in front of him, and made a formal bow. He was a little man, and very fat. He wore a navy blue coat that was cut very short at the back, so that it ruckled up over his round haunches, and his collar rose so high and stiff above a white Ascot tie, that he was forced to carry his head tilted backwards in the direction of his waxed moustache. His face was purple and his watery eyes stared, whether as the result of the collar's asphyxiation or his past manner of life it was difficult to say. His feet were excessively small, and his striped grey trousers tapered to the ankles in such a way that every step he made seemed a nice feat of balancing. He bowed to Edwin, and Edwin explained the urgent circumstances of his mission.

'I see,' said Professor Beagle. 'I quite understand. You must not, 'owever, expect me to be able to

turn you out as I should wish to in the time at our disposal. Perhaps you will be good enough not to mention my name in this connection, and keep my instructions, as it were, dark?'

Edwin assured him of secrecy, and the professor proceeded to ask him where the dance was to be held. 'I do not wish to teach you anything that will not be useful,' he said. 'In some circles the Quadrille, which I myself consider the most dignified of dances, is still in favour. In others the Valeta is coming into vogue. In different planes of society different conditions prevail.'

In the end the professor decided that Edwin's case called for the Waltz, the Lancers, and the Polka, with the possible addition of the Pas de Quatre. He demonstrated to Edwin the position in which his feet should be placed, and then invited him to have a try at the waltz.

'You will take my harm, please, in the following way . . . so. . . . Now, neither grarsping nor clarsping, let the lady's 'and lie gently in yours, with the fingers 'alf bent, and under no circumstances squeeze the figger. So . . .'

Edwin placed his right arm above the ruckles in Professor Beagle's broad back: into his left hand a podgy fist descended like a lump of moist dough, and from the little man's back-tilted, strangled head a faint sound of whistling proceeded that raked Edwin's own nostrils with a cross-fire of whisky and cachous. Then the professor began to revolve like a peg top, and Edwin felt himself swept round by the arm that lay upon his shoulder, to the rhythm of the whistled tune, which was sometimes suspended and replaced by: 'Wonn-two-three. Wonn-two-three. Wonn-two-three. Gen-tly now. Keep-on-the. Tips-of-your. WONN-two-three. Toes.'

In this manner they circled the room several times. Edwin was getting out of breath; but the professor, to whom this form of exercise was so usual as to be negligible, showed no signs of fatigue, except that his eyes became a little more glassy and his cheeks more purple. Indeed, the power by which he swung Edwin round the room was a thing of mystery; for his little feet did not seem to move, and the upper part of his body was rigid. He moved like a cyclone or a dust-storm, Edwin thought, revolving terrifically on its own axis.

'I am afraid,' said Professor Beagle formally at the end of the first lesson. 'I am afraid you have no great natural gift. It is better that I should be candid with you. You will need half a dozen lessons at least before you can take your place with the young ladies in one of my advanced classes.'

Edwin stuck to it. On six more occasions he visited the Assembly Rooms, where, with exactly the same formalities, Mr Beagle received him. With Mr Beagle in his arms, prevented by sheer physical bulk from, in any circumstances, squeezing the figger, he revolved in the vortex of the waltz. In the Lancers he set to imaginary partners, or went 'visiting' with Mr Beagle's hand lying gently in his, with the fingers 'alf bent. In the Pas de Quatre, where the draught of whisky and cachous was happily directed forwards, he pointed an awkward toe alongside Mr Beagle's tapered and elegant extremity. In the end the professor pronounced himself satisfied with him.

'If I were you,' he said, 'I think I should come along to my advanced class this evening and familiarise yourself with the proximity of young ladies. The fee is a purely nominal 'alf-crown.'

Edwin decided to do so, and walked up in the

evening with his patent leather pumps in his pocket. He felt very shy. The place was lighted with flaring gas jets, and in a room marked Gentlemen, that he had always taken for a lavatory, a number of young men, who looked like shop assistants, were putting on white kid gloves. They all seemed to know one another and to look upon Edwin as an intruder. No one spoke to him, and he waited in the cloak room until the last had disappeared before he dared to emerge. From the room on the opposite side of the passage there issued a breeze of concentrated perfumes, and a round of subdued titters. This room was labelled 'Ladies.'

While Edwin stood waiting and wondering if he dare risk an encounter, the door opposite opened and a bevy of bloused figures appeared. The sight of the first took him by surprise: it was the elder of the two anæmic young ladies in the drapery who travelled in the morning train with him from Halesby. She gave him a smile of recognition that revealed her defective teeth. This prospect was altogether too much for him. An acute shyness drove him back into the cloak room, and, as soon as he had taken off his pumps and put on his shoes again, he left the Queen's Assembly Rooms and bolted down Sackville Row to his train.

II

The Willis's dance, to which Edwin had looked forward with such mingled pleasure and anxiety, was destined to bring forth a violent emotional experience. Mr Jones had not undergone the experience of cutting for the undulant figure of Sir Joseph

Hingston for nothing. Apart from the fact that the sleeves were rather too long for his arms, Edwin's dress coat was a success, and, as Aunt Laura benignantly pointed out, it was just as well that some allowance should be made for future growth. Mr Jones had been extremely anxious that Edwin should be supplied with a magenta silk handkerchief, an ornament which, he was assured, all the best people wore stuffed in the corner of their waistcoats.

On this problem the Major had never delivered judgment, so Edwin mustered sufficient courage to approach Denis Martin for advice. Martin scornfully told him that the idea was preposterous. 'It's the kind of get-up that your friend Maskew would adopt,' he said. He also impressed upon Edwin the fact that the infallible index of a bounder in evening-dress was a ready-made tie. No doubt the advice was excellent; but it let Edwin in for an hour of agony on the evening of the dance, when the tie refused to answer to the Major's printed instructions, and finished up by making him look as if he had gone to bed in his boots and slept on it.

He had never been to Mawne Hall before. That pretentious mansion with its castellated façade set on a steep bank above the valley of the Stour, in which the works that maintained it lay, was so brightly lit upon this evening that it glowed like a lantern through the bare boughs of the hanging wood beneath. In the gun-room at the side of the hall in which the hats and coats of the guests were being received by Bassett, the Willises' coachman, he recognised a number of incredibly elegant creatures of his own sex with shining white waistcoats, pearl studs, and immaculate ties. He knew

scarcely any of them, for they were mostly neighbouring ironmasters or professional people to whose society the Willises' money had proved a sufficient introduction. Among them he recognised Sir Joseph Hingston, playing ducks and drakes with his aitches, and wearing, to Edwin's encouragement, a flagrantly ready-made tie. In this particular, at any rate, he was one up on the baronet. He hoped that some one else would realise this fact. In the middle of these reflections he thought he heard a voice that he recognised, and turned to find himself rubbing shoulders with Griffin. Edwin said 'Good-evening.'

'Good Lord, Ingleby, are you here? I haven't seen you since the pantomime night. What are you doing here? Do you know these people?'

It struck Edwin that he spoke rather contemptuously of his hosts.

'Yes. . . . I live near here, you know,' he replied. 'I didn't know the Willises were friends of yours.' As a matter of fact he knew nothing about the Willises' friends; but it sounded rather well.

'No . . . I don't know them,' said Griffin, 'but the old man is a business friend of my uncle's, and apparently they were rather hard up for men.' The sound of waltz music was heard, and Griffin left him hurriedly. 'See you later,' he said.

Edwin, anxious not to be left behind, pulled on his gloves and split the thumb of one of them. He passed through the hall, where his name was announced, rather contemptuously, as he thought, by Hannah, the Willises' tall and starchy servant, and was received in a manner that was reassuring and homely by Mrs Willis. She spoke for a moment of his mother, and tears gathered in her rather watery eyes; then she introduced him to her small

daughter Lilian, very self-conscious in a white party frock with a pale blue waistband, and another dark girl with beautiful grey eyes and a creamy rather than pale complexion, who was standing beside her. Miss Dorothy Powys, she said. Edwin, hedging for safety, booked a dance with Lilian, who took the matter as seriously as himself. Next, no doubt, he must have a shot at Miss Dorothy Powys, in spite of the disturbing beauty of her eyes; but when he came to ask her for a dance he saw that Griffin was talking to her.

'May I have another—number sixteen?' Edwin heard him ask easily. She smiled and nodded. Her smile seemed to Edwin very beautiful: so beautiful, indeed, that he couldn't possibly bring himself to approach her when Griffin turned away. It was awfully silly of him, he thought.

The evening was not exactly a success. He polkaed with Lilian, and took his place in the Lancers with several mature ladies to whom Mrs Willis introduced him. Luckily none of these belonged to Halesby, a circumstance that must be attributed to Mrs Willis's tact, so that the question of his origin never arose. He danced according to the letter of Professor Beagle's instructions. Neither grasping nor clasping, he let the ladies' hands lie gently in his with the fingers half bent, and in no circumstances did he squeeze the figger. What he missed was the terrific motive power that the unladylike Professor Beagle had applied to his revolutions. It now appeared to him that to supply this was the part of the male; and as most of the matrons with whom Mrs Willis supplied him were bulky, he had his work cut out. Once, returning thoroughly blown from one of these adventures he caught the eye of Dorothy

Powys; and he thought she smiled. Could this be true? He wondered. . . . During the greater part of the evening when he had not been dancing he had found himself following her movements with his eyes. He had decided that she must be at least a year or two older than himself; but that didn't really matter, for she seemed to him a creature of such very perfect grace, and her eyes, in the moment when he caught them, had been so wonderful. After the next dance, which was the one that she had booked with Griffin, he watched them disappear into the library.

It made him feel sick with himself that he hadn't taken the opportunity of his introduction. What a damned fool he was! And afterwards, when he watched her, she did not smile at all, either for him or for any one else. Indeed, she seemed pale, and anxious, as if something had happened to upset her. In despair Edwin wandered off into the card-room, where he saw Lady Hingston, who was partnering Mr Willis at bridge, revoke three times in two games, to the intense annoyance of her husband. From the card-room he strolled on to the buffet, where he found Griffin absorbing quantities of whisky and soda. He begged Edwin to join him; but Edwin, who was particularly anxious to behave himself, stuck to claret-cup.

'Well, have you struck any cuddle?' said Griffin brutally, with his mouth full.

'Any what?'

'Cuddle. . . . Girls. . . . What the devil do you think one comes to a dance for?'

'No. . . . I haven't,' said Edwin.

'Well, they are a pretty scratch lot,' Griffin confessed. 'That Powys girl's all right though.'

Edwin blushed furiously. He suddenly wanted

to throw his glass of claret-cup at Griffin's head. Why? . . . He calmed himself.

'Do you know her?' he asked.

'Never met her before to-night. She's got a topping figure. She must be pretty well connected. Lord Alfred Powys is one of their directors here.'

'But you don't mean to say——' Edwin began.

'The night is yet young,' said Griffin, gulping another whisky. 'God, there's number twelve! I must hook it.'

Edwin wandered back to the ball room. He couldn't keep away from it, but, at the same time, he was anxious not to appear disengaged, for fear that Mrs Willis should induce some other heavy partner to abandon her arm-chair for his amusement. He hung about the pillars of the folding doors that led into the supper room, just out of range of Mrs Willis's maternal gaze. From this point he could watch the beautiful Miss Powys, and wonder, with a sort of bitter excitement, exactly what Griffin had meant by his suggestions. Watching her, he could not believe that she could be anything but graceful and beautiful in everything she did. The band started to play the music for a waltz : number sixteen. He remembered it was the second dance that Griffin had booked with her. For some reason that he couldn't imagine, he felt that he wanted to be near when Griffin came for her : perhaps he could tell her attitude towards him by something that she might say. He went over to the place where she was sitting next to Mrs Willis. He tried not to look at her.

In a moment he heard Griffin's voice. 'Ours, I think.' The tone was a little blurred by Griffin's potations.

'I think you've made a mistake,' she said.

Edwin turned round, and at the same moment she looked towards him. 'Surely I am dancing this with you, Mr Ingleby.'

'But look here, I'm sure these are your initials on my programme, Miss Powys. Let me look at yours.'

He tried to take the programme from her fingers, but she moved it away.

'Really, we mustn't contradict each other, Mr Griffin. The dance is Mr Ingleby's. Will you take me, please?' she said to Edwin.

In an ecstatic dream Edwin found himself walking away with her on his arm. It was a miracle, an astounding, beautiful miracle. She picked up her skirt by the loop of ribbon with which it was suspended and looked him full in the eyes, smiling. 'Shall we start?' she said.

They started. In one fatal moment Edwin, who hadn't been doing badly at the beginning of the evening, forgot every single precept that Professor Beagle had taught him.

'I say, what a shocking dancer you are,' she said with a laugh.

'I'm most awfully sorry, I only learnt this week.' Now that his mind was diverted by speaking to her the steps came more naturally.

'That's better,' she said. 'Who on earth taught you?'

He confessed to Professor Beagle, and she appeared to be amused.

'You see you're dancing away from me all the time. Just as if you were afraid of me. You ought to hold me closer. It upsets the what d'you call it . . . centre of gravity.'

'I was told never under any circumstances to——' He couldn't very well repeat Professor Beagle's formula.

'Now you're getting on beautifully. Don't think about it. That's the idea. Just dance.'

The music ended. 'Where would you like to go?' he asked.

'Out into the hall, if you don't mind . . . on the stairs. I want to explain to you. It was really awfully good of you to take me on.'

'It was a wonderful piece of luck for me.'

They sat together on the shallow oak staircase and she proceeded to tell him that Griffin had upset her in the dance before by trying to kiss her shoulder. 'I really couldn't stick a repetition of that,' she said. 'Besides, I think the man had been drinking. So I just pitched upon your poor innocence and lied for all I was worth. Who are you, by the way? I only just remembered your name when Mrs Willis introduced us. She's rather a dear, isn't she?'

The music of the next dance struck up. 'Are you dancing?' Edwin asked eagerly.

'I don't know, I expect so. Just look at my programme. It's too dark for me to see.'

Edwin took the programme from her fingers. It was a thrilling moment. In the dusk he deciphered two initials, 'E. W.,' he said.

'Oh, that's only Edward Willis. He's very shy of me. If you've nothing better to do I think we'll stay here.'

It was so easy to talk to her. To Edwin, indeed, it seemed as if he had now become articulate for the first time in his life. She did not speak very much of herself; but she asked him many questions about his life at school, where, he confided to her, he had first known Griffin, and then again about his new work in North Bromwich. And when she did speak her voice was low, and her speech, to

his ears, of an amazing limpid purity, more beautiful than any human speech he had ever heard. Edwin would have liked to listen to it for ever. He felt that he wanted words to describe its peculiar music, but no words came to him. He could only remember a line in Browning's *Pauline*:—

'Her voice was as the voice of his own soul
Heard in the calm of thought. . . .'

That was the nearest he could get to it; but the words, although they expressed a little of his absorption, did not convey the musical qualities that he wanted to describe. He tried to compare it with the tones of some instrument that he knew, but neither wood-wind nor strings suggested what he wanted. No . . . it was a sound nearer to nature than any man-made instrument. It was the voice of a Naiad: the sound of running water in a clear brookland. And all the time that he listened to her he was thrillingly conscious of her physical presence. She was sitting on the stair beneath him, and fortunately she could not see that he was gazing at her in the gloom, thinking how beautifully shaped was the nape of the neck from which her dark hair was drawn upwards; overcome by the loveliness and smoothness of her curved shoulder.

'I'm talking all the time,' he said, 'and you're saying nothing. It's rather a shame . . . because you speak so beautifully.'

'Whatever do you mean?' For a moment her eyes were on his. He dared not look at them. He could not answer her, for the moment seemed full of such an overpowering sweetness.

'Do tell me.'

'Oh, I only mean that when you say a thing like that, it . . . it suggests that everything about you is marvellously clean and clear and musical——' He paused, for he felt that she might laugh at him.

'Yes . . . go on,' she said.

'Like water in a hill country. It makes me feel as if I weren't within a hundred miles of North Bromwich.'

She laughed softly, but not unkindly.

'No, I'm not a bit like that. I'm really awfully hard and worldly—I wish I were the least bit what you imagine. You're most awfully young, aren't you?'

Perhaps she did not mean the word cruelly, but it seemed very cruel to Edwin. It was quite possible that she was a few years older than himself, if age were to be counted by years; but in reality he knew that she was beautifully young, certainly young enough to love and to be loved.

'Don't let's talk about me,' she said.

'But I want to talk about you.'

He wanted to talk about nothing else. His head was full of words that he wanted to throw before her like jewels, but he did not know how much he dared to say. He knew it was impossible for him to express a hundredth part of his delight in her. It would be nearly as bad as kissing her neck in the manner of Griffin, to say that the curve of it sent him delirious with joy. It would be indecency rather than candour to say that the faint scent of her intoxicated him. He was silent with tremulous emotion. He wondered if she could be conscious of it; and he could not guess, for she, too, did not speak. From the ballroom they heard the music of another dance begin. Two shadowy couples emerged from the passage beneath them. A curtain

of Indian beading made a sound like dead leaves driven over a dry pavement by the wind. The intruders' voices died away.

'I suppose we must go too,' she said with a sigh.

'Why must you go? Are you dancing?' Edwin asked, with a catch in his throat.

'No, I don't think I shall dance any more. I was rather upset. It was silly of me. But I think we'd better go.'

Edwin offered her his arm in the best manner of Professor Beagle.

'Thank you,' she said in a low voice. For a moment she hesitated. She was smiling, and her eyes were wonderful in the gloom. Their faces were level with each other. And, suddenly, amazingly, she kissed him.

'I'm going,' she said. Edwin tried to take her hand as she moved away from him. For a second it lay in his, soft and small and warm. Then, before his arms had time to follow the impulse of his flaming brain, she had slipped away from him and passed into the shadow of the passage. He stood there at the foot of the stairs alone, his heart thudding like a steam-hammer in a bewildered, intoxicating elation. Why had she left him? Why? . . . unless it were only a part of her adorable modesty. That must be the reason : and yet it was hardly consistent with an exalted ideal of modesty to kiss a young man, whom she had only known for fifteen minutes, on the lips. A new aspect of the miracle presented itself to him. Was it possible, after all, that Griffin had been right, that she was really exactly what he had insinuated, a fast little baggage who had determined, in a sudden caprice, to throw Griffin over and try a new experiment?

He could not believe it. Everything that he had noticed and adored in her, her grey eyes, the delicious quality of her speech, her fragrance, the indescribable fineness—there was no other word for it—of her, denied the possibility. He found it difficult to realise that she had gone in the moment of such an astounding revelation. Such was the way of a Naiad, melting away out of her sweet mortality in the moment of possession. Standing alone at the foot of the gloomy staircase, listening in a dream to the luscious music of the Choristers' waltz, he tried to recreate his dream out of memory. Nothing of her was left but her delicate perfume. On the stairs he saw a small crumpled muslin handkerchief from which the perfume came. He picked it up with the reverence of a pilgrim touching a relic, eagerly triumphant that he had managed to rescue a fragment of his dream. It did not strike him that this tiny square of scented muslin was presumably the instrument with which divinity blew its nose: and indeed its dimensions scarcely fitted it for this material function. He placed it in the satin-lined pocket of Mr Jones's creation. It pleased him to think that it lay near his heart.

This, of course, was only the beginning of a romance. No doubt, in the course of the evening, he would see her again. Somehow he must persuade her to see him alone, and then he would be able to do all the magnificently passionate things of which her flight had cheated him. He would kiss her; he would hold her exquisiteness in his arms; he would tell her all the glorious things that he had been fool enough to withhold.

He went back into the ballroom. Nobody seemed to notice him there. It pleased him to think that these ordinary people were too dull in their

perceptions to guess at the wonder in his heart. It was a secret that he shared with only one other person in the world, and that secret had altered his whole outlook on life. He was no longer the timid boy, conscious of his social disadvantages and of his new dress clothes, who had entered the Willises' house a couple of hours before, but a man, a lover, to whose passion the whole beauty of the world ministered, a creature miraculously placed beyond the reach of envy or of scorn. He was happy to wait patiently for the supreme moment when he should see her again. And so he waited, mildly tolerant of Griffin, over whom he had scored so easily, of Edward Willis, who performed with a set face his penitentiary programme of duty-dances, of Mrs Willis, who watched the joy of her small daughter Lilian with the proud but anxious eyes of a mother hen, of Mr Willis circulating among his guests with an expansive smile, of poor Lady Hingston, still revoking automatically in the card-room.

But Dorothy Powys never returned to the seat that she had occupied under the shadow of Mrs Willis's wings. She had told him that she didn't mean to dance any more, but surely that didn't mean that he was not to see her again. He grew uneasy. Of course she could easily escape if she wanted to do so, for she was staying in the house. He wondered if he dared ask Mrs Willis what had become of her, but decided that this would certainly give him away.

Instead of doing this he posted himself in a corner from which he could hear everything that was said in Mrs Willis's circle. This was not a very profitable pursuit, for Mrs Willis was not an interesting talker, and the only excitement that penetrated

the broody calm that surrounded her was the arrival of her husband, very excited over a telephone message, that had no foundation in fact, announcing the relief of Ladysmith by General Buller. Edward was beginning to give the business up as a bad job when he saw a tall, languid man, whom he considered to be rather shabbily dressed, approach Mrs Willis and ask her what had happened to his niece.

'Oh, she was here half an hour ago,' said Mrs Willis. 'The poor child told me that she had a headache and was going to bed. I told Hannah to take her a hot water bottle. . . . I do hope you're quite comfortable, Lord Alfred,' she went on. 'It *is* nice, isn't it? to see all these young people enjoying themselves. At least it would be, if one didn't have to think of all the poor creatures in South Africa being fired at by these treacherous Boers.'

And the tall, shabby man mumbled, 'Yes . . . yes, certainly. . . . Very,' in his beard.

It was enough for Edwin. He said good-bye to Mrs Willis, who seemed only mildly surprised at his departure, and left the house. There was no reason now why he should stay. On the stone terrace he paused, listening for a moment to the muted music from within the house. In the upper stories only one window was lighted. He could see the glowing yellow pane beyond a bough of one of the cedars with which the lawn was shaded. He wondered if that window were hers. He would like, he thought, to stay there all night in the black shadow of the cedar, gazing at that window and feeling that he was near her. Later on, no doubt, the light would be extinguished, and then he would imagine her lying there asleep.

How beautiful she must be when she lay there sleeping!

He sighed, and went on his way, under the wonderful night. He climbed the steep slope of Mawne Bank, under the smouldering pit-fires, in a dream, and found himself, surprised, beneath the walls of the cherry orchard at the back of Old Mawne Hall. Inside the walls the cherry-trees lay locked in a wintry sleep. He stopped, for the steepness of the hill had stolen his breath. He remembered a day when he had walked there with his mother. 'How mother would have loved her!' he thought. Yes . . . she was more wonderful than his mother. On the day that he remembered, so many years ago, it had been spring. The branches had been full of billowy bloom. Now, in the wintry night, he felt that spring was near: spring was in his blood, stirring it to new and passionate aspirations as in a few months time it would stir the dreamy sap of the cherry-trees. A strange, unseasonable miracle. Glorious, indefinite words formed themselves in his mind. Spring, with its warm, perfumed breath, triumphing beautifully over the powers of winter and death. Death at Colenso under those tawny kopjes. Love in his heart. A sublime, ecstatic muddle. . . . The Mawne furnaces leapt into a sudden flower of fire that made the sky above them tawny. Love was like fire . . . an exultant leaping flame.

He did not know where he was going until he found himself at home in his little shabby room taking off his dress-suit and staring at himself as a stranger in the dusty mirror. 'Who am I?' he thought, 'that this should have happened to me? I do not know myself. I am greater and more wonderful than the image that I see in the glass.'

He placed his precious talisman of muslin under his pillow, and wondered if he might be blessed with a dream of her. 'She kissed me,' he thought. 'She kissed my lips——'

III

It was evident that if he were to see her again he must make friends with Edward Willis. He was sorry that he had not done so before. For once in a way the recommendations of Aunt Laura had been prophetically right. His self-consciousness made it difficult for him to do so, for he felt certain that this cold, calculating young man would see through him. For two days he debated with himself on the various ways in which Mawne might be approached without coming to any satisfactory conclusion. On the third he was so lucky as to meet his victim on the Halesby train. Willis did not seem in the least anxious to renew their acquaintance; and it was at the expense of some awkwardness that Edwin managed to drag him into conversation.

They talked a little about the war, which Willis seemed to view from a remote and pessimistic angle. From that, by way of Mr Willis's Ladysmith rumour, they passed on to a discussion of the dance. Edwin was enthusiastic.

'I'm glad you enjoyed yourself,' said Willis. 'I hate dancing.'

'I rather admired that Miss Powys,' said Edwin.

'Dorothy Powys? Yes, she's a pretty girl, isn't she?'

'Who is she?'

'Oh, she's a niece of Lord Alfred Powys, one of

our directors. Lives with him, I believe. I don't really know her.'

'Isn't she staying with you?'

'Oh, no. . . . She only stayed at Mawne for the night of the dance. Her uncle happened to be coming over for a directors' meeting, and the governor asked him to bring her along with him as there was a dance on.'

This was all very discouraging.

'Where do they live?' Edwin asked.

'Somewhere over in the Teme valley, I think. Lord Alfred's a great fisherman. He's a nice chap.'

'And she lives with him?'

'Yes. . . . I think he's sort of adopted her. But I understand she's going to India sometime next month.'

'India? What on earth is she going to India for?'

'Going to be married to some fellow in the Indian army. A major, I think he is.'

'To be married——' said Edwin.

And the train pulled up at Mawne Halt.

IV

He took it very hardly. On the face of it, it seemed that her kiss had been no more than a piece of mad, cynical trifling; but his respect for himself—which was considerable, as became his years—would not allow him to believe this. He decided, instead, that Dorothy Powys's kiss had been the symbol of a great and noble passion, fated, in the melancholy manner of nearly every legendary lore, to frustration. He was convinced

that the unknown major in the Indian army would never be loved; that the memory of that intense moment on Mr Willis's back stairs would haunt his wife for ever, and temper with romance the vistas of an unhappy marriage. The main result of the incident in Edwin's case was a spate of passionate but imitative verses, a new devotion to such music as repressed his particular portion of *weltschmerz*, and an anxiety to confide the story, with elaborations, to some sympathetic friend. He turned it on to W.G.

'Well, W.G., what do you think of it?' he asked, when he had finished.

W.G. sucked at his pipe and smiled good-humouredly.

'Better luck next time old chap,' he said.

CHAPTER VI

THE DRESSER

I

In the following June the second professional examination was held. On a stifling morning, when the blue brick pavements of North Bromwich reflected a torrid heat, and a warm wind, blowing like a sirocco from the black desert outside, swept the streets with clouds of dust, Edwin, Maskew, and W.G. waited in the cloakroom outside the Dean's office to see the results of the examination posted. Maskew was the only one of the three who showed no signs of nervousness; for W.G. could never overcome the difficulty of expressing his thoughts on paper, and Edwin had passed ten minutes of purgatory with an outside examiner in the anatomy *viva*. He knew, on the other hand, that his Physiology had been extraordinarily good, and put his faith in the general impression of intelligence that he hoped he had created.

The porter came out with the lists, and W.G., striding to meet his fate like some Homeric hero, snatched the paper from his hands. He went very white as he read it.

'Good God——' he said. 'Well, I'm damned——'

'Rotten luck if you're down, W.G.,' said Maskew sympathetically.

'Down? . . . I'm not down. I'm through.'

He still looked bewildered. Edwin took the paper from his trembling hands. As he had expected Maskew was first, but he saw that he himself was second on the list. Martin had ambled through

respectively somewhere about the middle. W.G. and Harrop were last and last but one. He pinned the list on the notice-board. It was an exhilarating moment in which he was conscious of the herculean, sweaty handgrip of W.G., who was muttering: 'Well, I'm damned if we don't all deserve it.'

Talking and laughing together, they went out to lunch at Joey's and caught the next train down to Evesham, where the coolness of the glassy Avon made the June heat more tolerable, and in the evening, blistered with rowing and sunshine, they came back to North Bromwich, dined together, and afterwards went to a music-hall. It was wonderful to Edwin to see the physical elation of W.G. The big man wanted to dance like a child, and it was with difficulty that Maskew restrained him from smashing a plate-glass window in Sackville Row. 'You're a cold-blooded swine, Maskew,' he said indignantly. 'God, man, don't you feel you want to do something? You must let off steam in some way, and it's just as well to do it decently.'

Next morning the Dean sent a message to Edwin and Maskew, asking them to call at his office during the morning. They went together, and were received with his usual urbane politeness.

'Good-morning, Mr Maskew . . . Mr Ingleby. . . . You had better sit down. I am very pleased to see your names at the top of the list. Yes . . . very pleased. I've consulted Dr Moon, and he approves your appointment as prosectors. It is an office that you will be very wise to undertake if you have any surgical ambitions, and I am very pleased to offer it to you. Perhaps you will let me know to-morrow? Thank you, gentlemen. . . . Good-morning.'

'Shall you take it?' said Edwin, as soon as they were outside.

'Of course I shall. I'm rather keen on Anatomy. It only means putting one back a year, and it's worth it a hundred times over, if one gets the primary Fellowship. You'll be a fool if you don't do it. We should have a topping time together. No lectures . . . just a year of research work.'

'I shall have to think about it,' said Edwin.

It was the financial side of the question that had to be considered. To add another year to a course that was already expensive in pursuit of an elusive Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons: was it worth while? To begin with, he might easily fail. The primary examination was notoriously fluky, the results depending on the individual caprices and preferences of examiners. Edwin knew very well that better men than himself had failed in it. If, after draining his father's pockets for another year, he should be ploughed, the situation would be altogether too pathetic.

Anything that affected his father's purse seemed to Edwin, in those days, a matter for delicacy and shame. He hated to receive money from him. It was an acute embarrassment to see him write a cheque. He wrote slowly, with a regular, formal hand, and all the time Edwin, watching him, would think how many small, degrading sales of tooth paste and castor oil and pennyworths of camphor had gone to the making of that tenuous bank-account, and how easily and carelessly the painful accumulations would be spent. He hated asking his father for money, and for this reason had compelled himself to refrain from asking for the perfectly reasonable and necessary allowance that he had been wanting to settle for the last year.

And so he did not dare to tell his father that he had been offered the prosectorship and the opportunity of taking the Fellowship. If he had done so he was almost certain that Mr Ingleby would have consented, and his father's sacrifice would have thrown such a weight of obligation on him that life would not have been worth living. Indeed, if, in the end, he should have failed, his shame would have been intolerable. These reflections on the humility and penury of his father always plunged Edwin into a debauch of sentiment in which he would return with the zeal of a prodigal to the resolutions that he had made at the time of his mother's death. They filled him with a kind of protective fervour that might easily have been mistaken for love, but was, in reality, an excuse for its absence. Still, even if the sentiment harrowed, it consoled, and Edwin was heroically elated by the performance of a sacrifice that he had not been brave enough to refuse.

It pleased him also to find that W.G. was thankful for his decision. 'You see, it would have been rotten for me,' he said, 'if you and Maskew had both been left behind. When you've got into the habit of working with a fellow in your first two years, it's a bit of a break to have to go on by yourself. Of course, I should never have the least earthly chance of getting the Fellowship, and even if I had, I couldn't afford to waste a year over it. I'm damned glad you're coming on with me, Ingleby.'

The tribute was flattering. Edwin, always rather pathetically anxious for friendship, was particularly pleased to have it offered so frankly by a creature as unlike him in every way as W.G. There was something stable and reliable about the big man's

simplicity. He felt that he would be as loath to give offence to W.G. as to his father; and though he still felt some indefinite hankerings after the atmosphere of culture that he would have enjoyed in the society of Boyce, he couldn't deny the fact that W.G. was a sound and splendid fellow, and a good man to have by his side in an emergency. Together they plunged into the new world of hospital life.

II

Two general hospitals supplied the clinical needs of the North Bromwich Medical School. The older, from which the school had originated, was a small institution, the Prince's, with which Edwin had become acquainted on the occasion of his first panto night. It stood in the upper and healthier part of the city, in the middle of the slums that lie upon the fringe of the fashionable suburb of Alvaston: a solid building of early Victorian red brick, with a stone portico facing upon a thoroughfare of rather older houses that had once been reputable but had now degenerated into theatrical lodging-houses.

The hospital itself was small enough to be homely, and W.G. and Edwin soon became accustomed to its narrow entrance hall, and the lodge in which porters, who already knew all that was to be known about the reception of casualties, were housed.

Edwin would arrive at the hospital early in the morning, when no sign of life was to be seen in the 'professional' lodgings sleeping with drawn blinds upon the other side of the road. At this time of the day the hospital porch smelt clean and antiseptic, for the stream of stinking humanity had not yet begun to trickle through. He would hang his

coat in the narrow passage that served for cloak-room and lounge with a cigarette in his mouth before the glass-fronted notice-boards on which the lists of operations for the day were exhibited, and exchange greetings with the night porter departing in a state of frowsy ill-temper, or the day-porter coming on duty with a military swagger and his grey hair plastered down with vaseline, from the casualty department, and cold water.

Here, too, the members of the consulting staff would arrive in their frock-coats and top-hats: great men, such as Lloyd Moore, the outstanding surgical genius of the Midlands; old Beaton, the professor of surgery, with his long, grey beard, and Hartley, the ophthalmologist, whose reputation was European. These giants would pass on through the swinging doors to their wards or consulting rooms, and on the very stroke of nine, W.G., who was a bad riser, and always cut things fine, would plunge in, carrying with him the strenuous atmosphere of a cold sponge and breezy enthusiasm. Then the clock would strike nine, and they would pass on together arm in arm, into the huge, airy waiting-hall with innumerable benches set crosswise like the pews in a church; and, at the same moment, the military porter, who had been marshalling the queue of out-patients, would release them, and a bewildering crowd of poorly-clad human wreckage would drift in behind them, settling patiently into the benches opposite the door of the department from which they were seeking relief.

The work of Edwin and W.G. lay in the Casualty Department, a small room full of pleasant morning light. On one side of it ran a long counter with shelves for bottles, and drawers in which plasters, dressings, and ointments were kept. On the other,

half a dozen chairs were ranged for the reception of patients. The medical staff consisted of four persons only: two professionals, a young and enthusiastic surgeon named Mather who held the post of Assistant Surgeon to Out-patients, and an elderly sister who had been on the job for years, and two amateurs in the shape of Edwin and W.G.

All of them were clothed in white overalls; for the work of the casualty department was of a dirty nature, and these long garments also served as some protection from the swarming parasites that lived upon the bodies of their patients. Edwin, who suffered agonies of irritation from their attacks, also armed himself with a glass-stoppered bottle of ether with which he would drench the seat of irritation in the hopes of inflicting death or at least unconsciousness upon his tormentors.

Then, one by one, the patients would file in, and plant themselves upon the wooden chairs: old men whose skins were foul with the ravages of eczema and dirt combined; women, exhausted in middle age by child-bearing, and the accepted slavery of housework; sturdy mechanics who had been the victims of some unavoidable accident; pale young women, made anxious for their livelihood by illness that its conditions had caused, and, more terrible than all, the steady stream of wan, transparent children, the idols of maternal care, the victims of maternal ignorance.

In the human wreckage of the casualty department there was no great variety; but all of it was new to Edwin and W.G., and they threw themselves into the labour with enthusiasm, working so hard from nine o'clock till one, that their backs ached and they lost all sense of the passage of time. Mather himself seemed to them

a prodigy of skilfulness, so swift in his decisions, so certain and adroit in the work of his hands. Even the sister, whom Edwin had originally regarded as a mere woman, aroused their admiration by the ease with which she worked and her invincible good humour. Edwin found that she could teach him more than his male superiority would ever have dreamed.

Little by little the astounding confusion of their work began to seem more simple. Bandages, that had seemed condemned to unsightly ruckles, or liable to fall unrolled upon the dirty floor, began to fold themselves in symmetrical designs. Edwin and W.G. vied with one another in the neatness of their dressings. The smell of the place, that had seemed at first to fester beneath an unconvincing veil of carbolic and iodoform, now seemed natural to their nostrils, even pleasant in its familiarity.

Edwin began to have time to look about him, to form individual attachments to the patients who came there every day, to take a particular interest in cases that he regarded as his own. Gradually, from the mass of evil-smelling humanity, personalities began to emerge and even intimacies that were flattering because they implied a trust in his own imperfect skill.

He did not know the names of his patients any more than they knew his. To him they were grouped under conventional generics: Daddy, Granny, Tommy, Polly, and the like. To them he was always 'Doctor'; but the thing that made them human and lovable to him was the sense of their dependence on him; and the preference for his attentions that was sometimes timidly expressed, gave him a flush of gratification deeper than any he had ever known. It pleased him to think that

it was true when his patients told him that he dressed them more gently than the other workers in the casualty department. Such confidences almost convinced him that he had found a vocation.

After lunch Edwin and W.G. would talk over their cases together in the lounge of the Dousita. Maskew, who still met them every day at this resort, found their conversation boring, and fell back more and more upon the charms of Miss Wheeler, who did not seem to have varied by a single hairpin since the day of their first acquaintance. And from the discussion of their individual cases, W.G. would sometimes pass on to the more general questions that their work aroused.

'This life's worth living,' he would say. 'When you first take up medicine and spend a couple of years over learning the atomic weights of heavy metals or dissecting the stomach of an earthworm, you begin to wonder what the devil you're getting at; by Gad, this hospital work opens your eyes. You're doing something practical. What's more, you're doing a job that no professor of classics or stinks could touch, and you see the actual results of your treatment on your patients.'

'Thank God I'm not one of them, W.G.,' said Maskew morosely. 'As a matter of fact, it's no more than when an electrical engineer finds a short circuit and makes a new connection, or when a carpenter makes a job of a rickety staircase.'

'That's all you know about it, my friend,' said W.G. 'In our job you're dealing with human life; you're relieving physical pain—and sometimes you get thanked for it, which is damned pleasant. And you've a responsibility too. If you make a slip the poor devil you're experimenting on is going

to suffer. You may even kill him. And the extraordinary thing is that he trusts you . . .'

To Edwin also that was the most extraordinary thing, and, indeed, the most pathetic. It showed him that the practice of medicine imposed an actual moral discipline on those who followed it: an obligation of the most meticulous honour and devotion. But if the discipline of practice demanded much, it repaid a thousandfold. He had his reward not only in the thanks of the scabrous old men whose varicose ulcers, or 'bad legs,' as they called them, he dressed, but in the rarer consciousness of actual achievement which came to him more frequently as the scope of his work extended.

One case in particular he always remembered, principally because it was the first of the kind. She was a little Jewish tailoress who laboured at piecework in some sweater's den in the rookeries on the southern side of the hospital. She was not beautiful. Her face had the peculiar ivory pallor, and her whole body the unhealthy brittleness, of plants that have sprouted in a cellar. But her voice was soft, and her hands, the fingertips of which were made callous by the plucking of threads and rough with innumerable needle pricks, were beautifully shaped. A week or so before she had stabbed her left forefinger with an infected needle, and lit a focus of suppuration in the tendon sheath. She had to live, poor thing! and so, for a week she had worked in a state of agony, while the tissues grew tense and shiny with compression, and the pain would not let her sleep. At last, when she could work no longer, she had come to the casualty department, nursing her poisoned hand in a bandana handkerchief. She had not slept for four nights, and was very near to tears.

Edwin, who saw that surgery was needed, showed the case to Mather. The surgeon stripped the sleeve from her thin, transparent arm and showed him the red lines by which the poison was tracking up the lymphatics towards the glands of the axilla that stood like blockhouses in the way of bacterial invasion.

'Why didn't you come before?' he said, with a roughness that was not unkind. How many times was Edwin to hear those very words!

'I couldn't, doctor. There was my work——'

'There'd be no more work for you, my dear, if you went on much longer,' said Mather: and then, to Edwin, 'Yes . . . you'd better incise it at once, I'm busy putting up a fracture. Straight down in the middle line. Don't be afraid of it.'

'Oh, you're not going to cut me, doctor?' she said. 'Not till to-morrow. . . . Oh, please . . . when I've had a night's sleep.'

He was very nervous. He assured her that he would give her no pain; but while he left her to fetch the scalpel and the dressings he heard a queer drumming noise and turned to see that it was made by the heels of his patient trembling on the floor. He was nearly as tremulous himself.

'I promise you I won't hurt you,' he said, and she returned him a painful smile. It was a look he knew. 'Just like the eyes of a dog,' W.G. had said.

He sprayed the finger with ethyl chloride, that froze into a crust like hoarfrost on the fingertip and blanched the skin that was already pale with the pressure inside it. All the time the girl was making little nervous movements, and sometimes her heels began to drum again until she tucked them under the bar of her chair.

'I'm sorry, doctor, I can't help it,' she said.

Then, with his scalpel, he made a clean longitudinal cut through the tense skin down to the bone of the phalanx. She gave a start and clutched his hand so that he nearly gave it up. 'I've got to do it,' he thought, 'I *must* do it.' It was the first time that he had ever cut with a knife into living flesh. A strange sensation. . . . But the bead of matter that escaped showed him that he had got to the root of the trouble, and the sight of it filled him with a new and curious exultation.

It was a long business, for the neglected pressure had impaired the vitality of the bone and the wound would not heal until the dead spicules had been separated from the living tissue. Edwin dressed the finger every morning. The patient would have been a poor subject at the best of times, and he knew that the fact that she was now out of work probably meant that she was starving. It would have been easy for him to tell her that she must have plenty of nourishing food; but he knew well enough that the words would have been no more than a mockery. In the hospital wards, he reflected, she might have been well fed; but the wards at the Prince's were full of more serious cases who could not walk to the hospital to receive their treatment. On occasions of this kind he wished that he were a millionaire: an extravagant idea—for doctors are never millionaires. He could only ram iron into her and dress her and try to get her well so that she might travel back around the vicious circle to the conditions that had been responsible for her illness. It seemed to him that people who were not doctors could never really know anything about life.

In a little while there were others, many of them,

in whose cases he knew that he had been privileged to effect some positive good: notably an old woman, always dressed in black and loaded with crepe as though she were attending her own funeral, who had fractured her wrist by slipping on an icy pavement one evening when she was fetching her husband's supper beer, an office that she appeared far too ladylike ever to have performed. She had put out her hand to save herself, and a Colles fracture of the ulna and radius had been the result.

She called Edwin 'My dear,' and the first thing that he noticed about her was the amazing cleanliness of her withered skin. He remembered the fortitude that she had shown when first he reduced the fracture; how her bony fingers, on one of which was a wedding-ring worn very thin, had clasped his. For some curious reason he felt very tenderly towards her, and when the bones were set and he had passed her on to the massage department, he felt quite lost without her early 'Good-morning!' That was another strange thing about medical practice: the way in which people with whom he was thrown into an intimate sympathy for a few days passed completely and irrevocably out of his life.

W.G. and Edwin found their experience so intriguing that they took turns to visit the casualty department in the afternoons when the work was light, and the absence of Mather gave them a free hand in the performance of minor surgery. At this time of the day the work of the department was more suggestive of its name; for the people who came there were nearly all the victims of sudden illness or accident that needed diagnosis and immediate treatment. It pleased Edwin to deal with these off his own bat, and he spent the long

afternoons that were free from lectures in suturing wounds, removing brass filings or specks of cinders from eyes, extracting teeth, gaining confidence every day and suffering the mingled emotions of pain, pity, and violent indignation. Not infrequently the last . . . for he saw so much suffering that might easily have been prevented but for the ignorance or callousness of humanity. These things aroused his anger; but he soon realised that anger was the one emotion that a doctor is most wise to suppress.

Sometimes a woman from one of the neighbouring slums would enter in a state of hollow-eyed terror, carrying in her shawl a child that was obviously dying from broncho-pneumonia.

'Why, in the name of Heaven, didn't you come up before?' he would ask indignantly.

'The neighbours said it was only the teething, doctor,' she would reply.

Edwin would try to suppress an inclination to damn the neighbours upside down. 'Surely you could see the child was ill?' he would say.

'Yes, doctor, but how could I get away? There's seven of them, bless their hearts, and me going with another, and the house looking like a pig-sty, and the master's dinner to cook. I haven't got no time to spare for hospitals.'

And he knew that she spoke the truth, contenting himself, as he filled in the form for admission to the children's ward, with telling her that the diet of bread-crusts soaked in beer, which she had been giving it, was not ideal for a baby eight months old.

'Take the baby along to ward fourteen,' he would say, 'they'll do what they can for it,' and be met, as likely as not, with a volume of tigerish abuse

from a wild-eyed woman who swore that if her baby was going to die it wasn't going to do so in any bloody hospital, was it, my pretty?—the last words sinking to a maternal coo and being accompanied by a paroxysm of kisses on the baby's lips that were already blue for want of breath. And then Edwin would control his indignation and resort to wheedling and coaxing, feeling that if the baby were left to the mercies of maternal instinct, he himself would be little better than a murderer.

Indeed, the responsibilities of his calling and its immense obligations impressed themselves on him more deeply every day. He saw that this profession of medicine was not to be taken lightly; that his work in it would be useless, almost impious, if it were not religiously performed. Even from the earliest ages this had been so. One day, idly reading a back number of the *Lancet*, he came upon a historical article that contained a translation of the Hippocratic oath, which had been administered to all those who were initiated in the mysteries of medicine two thousand years ago. It seemed to him that it might have been written on the day that he read it. Thus it ran :—

'I swear by Apollo the Healer, and Æsculapius, and Hygieia, and Panacea; and I call all Gods and Goddesses to witness, that I will, according to my power and judgment, make good this oath and covenant that I sign. I will use all ways of medical treatment that shall be for the advantage of the sufferers, according to my power and judgment, and will protect them from injury and injustice. Nor will I give to any man, though I be asked to give it, any deadly drug, nor will I consent that it

should be given. But purely and holily I will keep guard over my life and my art.

'And into whatever houses I enter, I will enter into them for the benefit of the sufferers, departing from all wilful injustice and destructiveness, and all lustful works, on bodies, male and female, free and slaves. And whatever in practice I see or hear, or even outside practice, which it is not right should be told abroad, I will be silent, counting as unsaid what was said.

'Therefore to me, accomplishing this oath and not confounding it, may there be enjoyment of life and art, being in good repute among all men for ever and ever: but to me, transgressing and perjured, the contrary.'

Fine reading, Edwin thought. . . . The only deity of whom he was not quite certain was Panacea. Obviously the classical representative of Mother Siegel. It seemed to him a pity that the modern student was not bound by the formulæ of the Physician of Cos.

His three months in the casualty department passed away quickly, and in the spring of the year he found himself attached as dresser to that startling surgeon, Lloyd Moore. The appointment, as he soon realised, was a privilege; for Lloyd Moore was the one man of unquestionable genius in the North Bromwich Medical School. At first the experience was rather alarming, for the vagaries of his chief, and, not least, his genial vulgarity, seemed at first as though they were going to destroy the pretty edifice of ideals that Edwin had constructed on the basis of the Hippocratic oath and his experience in the casualty department. Lloyd Moore, to begin with, was no respecter of persons,

ancient or modern; his wit was ruthless and occasionally bitter, as Edwin had reason to know; his language, particularly in moments of stress, was unvarnished and foul, even in the presence of women.

On the surface, indeed, he seemed a person whom Hippocrates would have regarded as undignified and improper. Sometimes in the outpatient department Edwin would blush for his chief's violence and cruelty, but, in the end, all these things were forgotten in the realisation that the little man was a great surgical genius, to whom diagnosis was a matter of inspired, unerring instinct, and practice a gift of the gods. Nor were his virtues merely professional. L.M. (as he was always called) was a man of the people, one who had fought his way inch by inch into the honourable position that he held as the greatest of surgeons and the wealthiest practitioner in the Midlands. The unpaid work of the hospital absorbed him even to the neglect of private practice, and every doctor in the district knew that he could count on the very best of the great man's skill for a nominal fee in any case of emergency. Far more than any consultant in the Midlands, he was regarded as the general practitioner's friend, and, as a result of this confidence, all the most interesting surgical material of the district found its way into his clinic.

In a little time Edwin became wholly subject to the spell of this amazing personality, until it seemed strange to him that he could ever have doubted the propriety of anything that L.M. said or did. He wondered more and more at the man's titanic energy, for Lloyd Moore was a little fellow, so pale that he always looked as if he were fainting with

exhaustion. His patients also adored him, and more than once Edwin was told in the wards by elderly female admirers that Mr Lloyd Moore was the very image of Jesus Christ.

In the days of the casualty department Edwin's main concern had been with the alleviation of immediate pain. The problem of the wards was graver, being no less than the balance of life and death. In the achievements of L.M.'s scalpel, he saw the highest attainment of which surgery was capable. In a hundred cases offhand he could say to himself that but for Lloyd Moore's skill the patient would have died, and when he saw the fragile figure of the surgeon with his pale face and burning eyes enter the theatre, Edwin would think of him as a man worn thin by wrestling with death . . . death in its most cruel and invincible moods.

But in the theatre, at the time of one of L.M.'s emergency operations, there was no time for dreaming or for romantic speculation. An atmosphere of materialism, of pure, sublimated action filled the room as surely as the sweet fumes of chloroform and ether. Everything about the place was clean and bright and hard, from the frosted glass of the roof and the porcelain walls to the shining instruments that lay newly sterilised in trays on the glass-topped tables. Even the theatre sister, in her white overall, gave an impression of clean, bright hardness. Indeed, in this white temple of sterility, everything was clean except those parts of the patient's body that the nurses in the wards had not scrubbed with nail-brushes and shaved and painted with iodine, and the language of L.M., whose physical lustrations had no effect whatever on his vocabulary.

Even L.M.'s language was at times a relief, for it

seemed to be the only human thing that ever gained admission to the theatre, and the sister was so inhuman as never to take the least notice of it. Not a smile, nor even the least compression of the lips marked her appreciation or disapproval of the surgeon's sallies. Physically she was an extremely attractive woman, with very beautiful eyes that were not without their effect upon Edwin; but the influence of the place robbed her of any sexual attributes, so that she became no more than a monosyllabic automaton, intent, devoted, faultlessly prepared for any of the desperate emergencies of surgery. From the first Edwin had noticed that the more embarrassing physical details of the patients had no disturbing effect upon her modesty. He soon saw that if she had permitted herself for one moment to be a woman she could not have remained the wholly admirable theatre-sister that she was. 'But I can't imagine,' he thought, 'how any man could marry a nurse——'

From such reflections he would be roused by the anaesthetist's laconic 'Ready.' On one side of the operating table he would stand, and on the other L.M. with the theatre-sister ready at his elbow. The surgeon would pick up a scalpel carelessly, as a man picks up a pencil to write, and then, apparently with as little thought, he would make a long, clean incision through the skin and superficial fatty tissues of the abdomen, putting his head on one side to look at it like an artist whose pencil has described a beautiful curve. Then, sharply: 'Swabs . . . Ingleby, what the hell do you think you're doing?' And Edwin would press a swab of gauze to the incision to absorb the blood that escaped from the subcutaneous veins.

'Right.'

Layer by layer the various planes of fascia, muscle, and peritoneum would be opened and neatly laid aside, every one of them slipped in its own pair of artery forceps. Then, from the gaping wound, that L.M. probed with his thin finger, a sickening odour would rise . . . one that Edwin never remembered apart from the other sickening smell of ether.

'Pus. . . . I thought so,' L.M. would say. 'The brute's perforated, damn him.' And Edwin knew that yet another creature had been snatched out of the jaws of death.

In the hands of L.M. surgery seemed so simple. His scalpel—for he used fewer instruments than any surgeon Edwin ever knew—was a part of him in the same way as a perfect rider is part of his horse. There was never any hesitation in his surgery, never any room for doubt; everything was straightforward and self-evident from the first incision to the last suture; and he was at his best when he threw into it a touch of bravura, rejoicing in the amazing virtuosity of his own technique and playing, a little, to the gallery.

'There you are,' he would say, 'you see there's nothing in it. Nothing at all but a working knowledge of anatomy and a dollop of common-sense. That's all surgery. Why on earth should they pay me a hundred guineas for doing a simple thing like that? There's nothing in it, is there?'

Edwin knew that there was a great deal in it: genius, and more than genius: a life of devotion to one end only; infinite physical strains; cruel disappointments; harrowing mistakes. For even L.M. had made mistakes in his time; and a doctor pays for his mistakes more heavily than any other man.

Apart from the performance of emergency operations, that might take place at any hour of the day or night, the surgeon only occupied his theatre on three mornings in the week; and the greater part of Edwin's time was devoted to the work of the wards. Here he performed his proper function as dresser, being, under the house-surgeon, responsible for the after-treatment of the patients on whom L.M. had operated. This business kept his hands full. Nearly all the acute surgical cases needed dressing daily, and some more than once a day. It was usual for the dresser to leave the second dressing to be done by the house-surgeon on his evening round, or by the sister of the ward, who would doubtless have performed it as well as either of them; but nothing could induce Edwin, in his newest enthusiasm, to drop a case into which his teeth were fixed.

The morning visits were ceremonial. .The great floors of the wards shone like the faces of such patients as were fit to be scrubbed with a soapy flannel; the rows of beds were set with a mathematical correctness, the sheets turned down at exactly the same level; the water in the jugs stood hot, awaiting the dresser's hands, his towel lay folded in the jug's mouth; a probationer, pink-faced and red-armed, stood waiting to do his professional pleasure; morning sunlight flickered over the leaves of aspidistras that flourished in pots on the central tables, and on the trays of dressing instruments that were ready for his hand.

At ten o'clock precisely, Edwin, an older and more experienced Edwin whose shaves were no longer a luxury, whose clothes no longer looked as if he were in the act of growing out of them, and whose collars were adorned by the very latest thing in

ties, would enter the ward, roll up his shirt-sleeves, and be helped on with a white overall by the obedient probationer—whose main function in life this office seemed to be—or sometimes by the sister herself The new Edwin, product of six months in hospital, was no longer afraid of these attentions because they happened to be performed by women. In a mild way he was even an amateur of the physical points exhibited by the *genus* probationer, and had arrived at a touching intimacy with the sisters, who found in him a clean and pleasant mannered youth, and on occasion hauled him out of the difficulties into which his inexperience landed him. Thus attired, he would begin his progress of the ward, followed, wherever he went, by the females who had robed him, the junior pushing before her the wheeled glass table on which the dressings and instruments were kept. For the time being he was, or imagined himself to be, the most important person in the ward, until, perhaps, the house-surgeon entered, and his attendants forsook their allegiance and hastened to put themselves at the service of this superior person.

In the duties of the wards Edwin became far more familiar with his cases than in the casualty department. The work was less hurried, and the patients themselves were less fully armed with the conventional social gestures by which men and women protect and hide themselves. They lay in bed helpless, dependent on the hospital staff for every necessity and amusement; and the stress of physical pain or the catastrophe of a major operation had generally shaken from them the little superficialities that they had gathered to themselves in the course of everyday life. Edwin noticed that, even at their worst, the women were hardly ever

too ill to be a little concerned for their personal appearance, and, as they grew better, the patients of both sexes would make a heroic attempt to appear as they wished themselves to seem rather than as they were; but he realised, none the less, that the doctor gets nearer to the bed-rock of human personality than any other man who ministers to humanity. With him, the person into whose hands their suffering bodies were committed in an almost pitiful confidence, they were concerned to hide themselves far less than with any other; and in this triumphant discovery Edwin flattered himself that he was becoming richly learned in human nature. He did not realise how little he had learned.

One thing, however, that these days taught him, he never lost in after life: an intense appreciation of the inherent patience and nobility of human beings, the precious ore that the fire of suffering revealed. Even the worst of his patients—in North Bromwich as elsewhere disease is an impartial enemy, falling on the virtuous and abandoned alike—revealed such amazing possibilities of good. In these hospital wards the fundamental gregarious instinct of mankind, with the unselfishness and sympathy that go along with it, asserted itself. The common life of the ward was happy, extraordinarily happy. Removed from the ordinary responsibilities of wage-earning and competition, fed and housed and tended without question, the patients lived together as happily as a community of African savages, supported by the female labour of the nursing staff, obedient to the unquestioned authority of the sister in charge.

And in Edwin's eyes these, too, were wonderful people. At first he had taken them more or less

for granted; but gradually he realised the tremendous sacrifices that their life implied: the long hours: the unceasing strain of keeping their temper: the clean, efficient materialism for which they must have sacrificed so much of the obvious beauty of life, committing themselves—for most of them were middle-aged—to an abnegation of the privileges of marriage and motherhood in a cloistral seclusion as complete as that imposed on the useless devotee of some mystical religion. He took it for granted that the life of a nun was useless to any one except herself. . . . Well, this was a religion worth some sacrifice: the religion of humanity. They themselves would only have called it a profession. At first it had seemed to him that their interests were narrow and their lives, of necessity, mean. He had been astonished at the small things that gave them pleasure: a bunch of primroses from a grateful patient; a ride on the top of a bus; a word of commendation from one of the consulting staff; a house-surgeon's or even a student's compliment; and, above all, the passionate attachments and enmities that made up the life of the nunnery in which they lived: but in the end he began to sympathise with them in the humility of their pleasures, to feel that anything might be forgiven to creatures who had made so great a sacrifice. In a mild way he idealised them; and for this reason they decided that he was 'quite a nice boy.'

IV

In the winter of his third year Edwin's newly formulated enthusiasm for humanity in the bulk suffered something of a check. The hospital absorbed him

so completely that in those days he saw very little of the city, going to and from his lectures and his work in the Pathological Laboratory at the University without taking any real share in the life of North Bromwich, or being aware of the passions and interests that swayed the city's heart. Coming down from the hospital, one evening in December, he suddenly became conscious of a constriction in the traffic which grew more acute as it reached the narrows that debouch upon the open space in front of the town hall; and while he was wondering what could be the cause of this, a huge rumour of voices, not unlike that which proceeds from a Midland football crowd when it disapproves of a referee, but deeper and more malignant, reached his ears.

He wondered what was the matter, and since it looked as if the traffic were now completely blocked on the main road, he cut down the quiet street that faces the university buildings and overlooks the paved court in which the statue of Sir Joseph Astill inappropriately dispenses water to a big stone basin. Almost immediately he found himself upon the fringes of an immense crowd over which the waves of threatening sound that he had heard at a distance were moving like cats-paws on a sullen sea. The windows of the town-hall itself blazed with light, making the outlines of the Corinthian pillars that surrounded it almost beautiful. He edged his way into the black crowd. It was composed for the most part of workers in iron and brass, and exhaled an odour of stale oil. In a moment of relative silence he asked the man who stood in front of him, a little mechanic who had not troubled to change the oily dongarees in which he worked, what was the matter.

'It's Lloyd George . . . the b——,' he said, and spat fiercely.

Edwin was not sure where he had heard the name before. He seemed to remember it as that of a Welsh member of Parliament who had come into notoriety during the debates on the South African War. He inquired what Lloyd George was doing.

'Come to speak agen' Joe,' said the mechanic savagely; and, as a wave of sound that had started somewhere in the middle of the crowd came sweeping towards them, he suddenly began to squeal hoarsely like a carnivorous beast in a cage: a ridiculous noise, that seemed, nevertheless, to express the feelings of the multitude. From scraps of conversation that he heard beneath the crowd's rumour, Edwin began to understand that this beggarly Welshman, who had spent the last few years in vilifying the workmen of North Bromwich generally, and their political idol in particular, had actually dared to bring his dirty accusations to the political heart of the city: the town-hall in which their favourite had delivered his most important speeches; that, at this very moment, the meeting which popular feeling had proscribed, was beginning behind the Corinthian pillars, and that the just indignation of North Bromwich had determined that he should not escape with his life.

It struck Edwin that whatever else the Welshman might be, he was certainly not lacking in courage; but, for all that, he found it difficult to prevent his own feelings in the matter from being swamped and absorbed and swept away by the crowd's vast, angry consciousness. Almost in spite of himself, his heart palpitated with vehement malice against the intruder. He felt that he would have experienced a brutal satisfaction in seeing him torn limb from limb.

A yell of extraordinary savagery, in which he found it difficult not to join, rose from the square.

The meeting, it seemed, had begun. Edwin saw members of the crowd scattering in all directions. A cry of 'stones!' was raised, and he saw that men, women, and children were streaming towards an area of slum that was being dismantled to make room for some monument of municipal grandeur, returning with caps and hands and aprons full of stones and broken brick. Soon the air was full of flying missiles, and though the crash of glass could not be heard, ragged holes were torn in the frosted glass of the town-hall windows.

A body of police, tremendous strapping fellows, marched by, followed by impotent jeers and hooting, and planted themselves in front of all the doors with truncheons drawn. Their presence seemed to enrage the crowd, inflaming that suppressed hate of the forces of order that slumbers in most men's hearts. The volleys of stones increased as the supplies of ammunition grew more plentiful. A little dark man with a red tie monotonously shouting the words: 'Free speech!' was caught up, and, as it seemed to Edwin, trampled to death. Somewhere in the middle of the struggling masses people began to sing the revivalist hymn: 'Shall we gather at the river?' It reached Edwin in an immense and gathering volume, with words adapted for the occasion:—

'Shall we gather at the fountain,
The beautiful, the beautiful, the fountain?'
We'll drown Lloyd George in the fountain,
And he won't come here any more.'

The very volume of sound was impressive and inspiring.

Suddenly the crowd was parted by the arrival of a new body. It was a phalanx of university students who had dragged an immense beam of oak from the debris of the dismantled slum and were hurling it forward as a battering ram against one of the principal doors. Edwin could see amongst them the towering shoulders of W.G., and the mouth of the elder Wade, the hero of the hansom cab, wide open and yelling. It seemed as though the savagery of the crowd had reached its height: they tore a way through it, trampling the fallen as they went. And then the police, who had been held in reserve, charged at right angles to them, hitting out right and left with their loaded batons. The less courageous part of the crowd tried to scatter. The wave of a stampede spread outwards till it reached the edge on which Edwin was standing. He was thrown violently from his feet into the chest of a stranger, who shouted, 'Hallo, Ingleby——' It was Matthew Boyce. 'I think we'd better get out of this,' he said.

The words seemed to pull Edwin back into sanity. Together they forced their way into a street that was empty but for a stream of people hurrying to the square with stones. They stood panting in the quiet.

'God . . . what animals men are!' said Boyce. 'I suppose it was something like this a hundred years ago, when they burned Priestley's house.'

'Yes, it's pretty rotten,' said Edwin, 'but didn't you feel you wanted to join in it?'

'Yes, that's the amazing part of it,' said Boyce. 'What's happening to you in these days? We seem to have lost sight of one another.'

They walked down to the station together.

'It's an extraordinary thing, isn't it?' said Edwin, 'that ordinary peaceable men should go mad like that?'

'They aren't men,' said Boyce. 'They're a crowd.'

CHAPTER VII

THE CLERK

I

With this chance encounter, the friendship of Edwin and Matthew Boyce really began; and during the fourth year, that now opened before him, the figure of W.G., who had dominated his stage by sheer physical magnitude, gradually receded. It was inevitable; for the atmosphere of the Boyces' house at Alvaston, with its air of culture and refinement, was far more in keeping with Edwin's inclinations than the obtuse, if honest, companionship of W.G. Edwin felt some misgivings for his desertion; but Maskew, who had now brilliantly taken his Primary Fellowship, began his hospital career and rejoined his old partner. So, seeing that the needs of W.G. were provided for and his responsibilities of friendship at an end, Edwin drifted into a happy intimacy with the poet's son.

They were both so young as to be convinced that they were very old. The world was theirs; for they were full of health and contentment and, at present, so free from complication that they could enjoy to the full the treasures of the past and shape the future into splendid dreams. In the beginning they had found a field of common interest in great works of literature; but these enthusiasms did not carry them very far, for the appreciation of literary masterpieces is at its best a solitary pleasure that is not increased by the joy of sharing. It was in the enjoyment of music that their friendship found the most intense of its pleasures.

Edwin's musical development had been slow. The first seeds had been planted in his babyhood when, without understanding, he had listened to his mother's playing. The chapel services at St Luke's, made interesting by the exotic harmonies of Dr Downton, had nursed his interest in the beauty of organised sound. The closed piano in his mother's drawing-room had been the symbol of an instinct temporarily thwarted, and from this he had escaped by way of Aunt Laura's late Victorian ballads which had seemed to him very beautiful in their kind. Luckily his mother's library of music had been good if old-fashioned, and when he amused himself, more or less indiscriminately, by trying to learn the piano at home, he had been forced to do so by way of the sonatas of Beethoven, Schubert, and Mozart, and the Wohltemperiertes Klavier of Bach.

The emotional disturbance of his strange adventure with Dorothy Powys had thrown him into an orgie of verse-making which produced such poor results that he was forced to turn to the love-poetry of the Elizabethans and of Shelley, which he embroidered with musical settings that gave him more satisfaction. These attempts at song-writing pleased him for a time; but it was not until he became friendly with Boyce that he began to realise what music was. Not only were the Boyces the possessors of a grand-piano on which his homely tinklings became magnificently amplified, but his friend's father, the poet, was intimately acquainted with the best of modern music.

Boyce introduced Edwin to the great German song-writers from Schubert and Schumann to Hugo Wolf, and laid the foundations of a feverish devotion to Wagner, whom the friends approached perforce by way of Tannhäuser and Lohengrin, the two operas

that the Moody Manners company ventured to present to provincial audiences. Edwin discovered that North Bromwich, a city that takes its music as a boa-constrictor takes food, in the triennial debauch of a festival and then goes to sleep again, supported—or rather failed to support—a society for the performance of orchestral music. The concerts were held fortnightly in the town-hall, the windows of which had now been repaired, and to these concerts Edwin and his friend went together, always sitting in the same two seats under the gallery at the back of the hall. In this way they heard a great deal of good music: the nine symphonies of Beethoven, with the Leeds Choir in the last: the usual orchestral extracts from the Ring, the Meistersingers Overture, and the Siegfried Idyll: the fourth, fifth, and sixth symphonies of Tschaikovski: the tone-poems of Strauss, and a small sprinkling of modern French music. These were ambrosial nights to which they both looked forward, and Martin, who had developed an unexpected inclination for music, sometimes went with them.

The concerts became the central incident in a kind of ritual. At seven o'clock the two, or sometimes three, would meet in the grill room behind the bar at Joey's and consume a gross but splendid repast of tripe and onions together with a pint or more of bitter Burton. All the best music, they had decided, was German, and beer was the only drink on which it could be fully appreciated, de Quincey's preference for laudanum notwithstanding. Pleasantly elated, they would cross the road to the town-hall and take their familiar seats, pleased to recognise the people who, like themselves, were regular attendants or subscribers to this unfashionable

function; and Boyce, who, by virtue of his distinguished parentage, knew every one in North Bromwich who was interested in music, would point out to them all the distinguished people who were present: Oldham, the critic of the *Mail*, whom Arthur Boyce declared to be the soundest living writer on musical subjects, and Marsden, who did the musical criticism for the *Courier*. Matthew knew them both. Oldham, he said, was a wonderful fellow, who wrote with a pen of vitriol that made such short work of baser metals that the gold of beauty appeared brighter for his writing. Oldham became Edwin's prophet; but, on the whole, he preferred the looks of Marsden.

'What is Marsden like?' he asked.

'Marsden? Oh, well, as a matter of fact, Marsden's a bit of a gas bag. The governor says that he always reminds him of an old hen. Didn't you notice him in Joey's talking nineteen to the dozen to that queer fellow with a face like a full moon who sits in front of us?'

The fellow with the face like a full-moon was only one of twenty or thirty people with whom the friends experienced a sort of comradeship on these nights. Perhaps the most wonderful time was the end of the concert when they would walk out together into the spring night, parting at the corner of the town-hall; and the memory of great musical moments would accompany Edwin home through miles of darkling country, and even fill his little room at Halesby with their remembered glory or wander through his dreams.

His life at home was the least satisfactory part of these enchanted years. There were moments, indeed, when it seemed as if the ideal relationship with his father, that had been his early ambition,

were being realised. Sometimes, on a Sunday morning, they would walk round the garden together in the sun, and Edwin would experience a return of the passionate good-will and anxiety to please that had overwhelmed him in the moment of their bereavement; but their two natures were radically so different that such moments were rare, and, when they came, were really more of an embarrassment than a pleasure.

He felt that, on his side at any rate, the relationship was artificial; that, however unnatural it might seem, he really had to whip himself up to a proper appreciation of his father's virtues. A sense of veiled but radical antagonism underlay all their dealings with each other; and at times this hidden thing, that Edwin held in such dread, came so perilously near to the surface as to threaten an open rupture.

The question of Edwin's allowance created one of these dangerous situations. Edwin knew that it was impossible for him to live the ordinary life of a medical student in North Bromwich without one; but the distaste for speaking of money matters, which arose from his delicate appreciation of his father's finances, had made it difficult to approach the subject. At last he had screwed up his courage to the point of making a very modest demand, and his father, instead of realising the difficulty he had found in doing so, had hedged in a way that made Edwin feel himself a hard and mercenary parasite.

'All right, father, we won't say anything more about it,' he said, comforting himself with the assurance that in a couple of years he would be qualified and in a position to earn his own living and pay his way. On the strength of this, and with his eyes wide open, he ran up a number of

small tailors' bills in North Bromwich; and all would have been well if Mr Ingleby, in a fit of absent-mindedness, had not opened these incriminating documents and leapt to the conclusion that his son was going rapidly to the dogs. An unfortunate scene followed.

'I suppose you realise, Edwin,' he said, 'that you are a minor, and that while you are under age I am responsible for these bills?'

'I've not the least intention of letting you pay them,' said Edwin.

'I'm afraid I have no alternative. I want you to tell me truthfully if there are any others.'

'Of course there are others. Please don't bother about them. In a little while I shall be able to pay them.'

'This is a great blow to me,' said Mr Ingleby solemnly, overwhelming Edwin with a picture of virtuous poverty staggering from a cowardly blow in the dark; and the obvious distrust with which his father regarded him made his position at home almost intolerable. It seemed to him that his father now looked upon all his pleasures with suspicion; and, as a natural result, he lived more than ever to himself, only returning to Halesby late at night or at times when he knew that his father would be busy in the shop. One circumstance came to bridge the gap between them, a course of pharmacology that Edwin took early in his fourth year. He was delighted to find a subject in which his father was more learned than himself, and spent a number of hours that were almost happy in the shop answering the questions that Mr Ingleby put to him on pharmacopœial doses and searching the little nests of drawers for rare drugs to identify in their raw state. But the pharmacology course

was short, and the subject that was so important in his father's life was small and unimportant in Edwin's. In addition to which he could not help feeling a sort of ethical prejudice against the complacency with which his father discharged patent medicines that he knew to be worthless if not harmful.

Every circumstance tended to isolate him from the influences of Halesby. His sudden attempt to be friendly with Edward Willis had withered under the humiliating *dénouement* of his adventure with Dorothy Powys; the new fields of music that he explored with Matthew Boyce had made him discontented with Aunt Laura's ballads; the general air of elegance and refinement with which he had become acquainted in one or two Alvaston houses to which the Boyces had introduced him, made everything in Halesby, even his own home, seem a little shabby and unsatisfactory. North Bromwich, and his work there, claimed him more and more.

II

Even when his first enthusiasms and the inspiring generalisations that arose from them were exhausted, he found that he could not escape from the fascination of the studies which he now pursued, for the most part, in the company of Matthew Boyce. His third year had not only introduced him to the romance of surgery and the human interests of hospital life. He had spent long hours in the pathological laboratory and had made acquaintance with bacteriology, a science that was still in its infancy.

In this work he had shared a desk with Boyce,

to whom it was particularly attractive, and between them they had developed a bacteriological technique rather above the average, taking an imaginative delight in the isolation of the microscopic deadly forms of vegetable life that are responsible for nearly all the physical sufferings of mankind. When they looked together at the banded bacilli of tubercule, stained red with carbolfuchsin, they saw more than a specimen under a coverglass : they saw the chosen and bitter enemies of genius, the malignant, insensate spores of lowest life that had banished Keats to fade in Rome, Shelley to drown by Via Reggio, Stevenson to perish in Samoa : the blind instruments of destruction that were even then draining the last strength from the opium-sodden frame of the author of *The Hound of Heaven*. Here, in a single test-tube, they could see enclosed enough of the organisms of cholera to sweep all Asia with a wave of pestilence; here, stained with Indian ink, the dreamy trypanosome that had wrapped the swarming shores of the Nyanzas of dark Africa in the sleep of death.

Both of them were seized with a passionate fever for research, to rid humanity of this insidious and appalling blight. Now, more than ever, they felt the supreme responsibilities of their calling; and when, in their fourth year, they passed on to their work in the medical wards, as clerks to the senior physician at the Infirmary, and saw the effects of bacterial havoc on the bodies of men and women, their enthusiasm rose to a still higher pitch.

The canons of the new university decreed that students who had learnt their surgery at one hospital should study medicine at the other. It was something of a disappointment to Edwin

to exchange the homely atmosphere of Prince's, where everything was familiar, for the colder and more formal wards of the Infirmary. This hospital, which was nearly twice the size of the other, was situated in the lower and less healthy part of the city. At Prince's there had been a way of escape westwards through the pleasant suburban greens of Alvaston to the country and the hills. The Infirmary, in its terra-cotta arrogance, had been set down in the heart of unreclaimed slums, in such a way that its very magnificence and efficiency were depressing by contrast. Edwin disliked the palatial splendour of its shining wards which, for all their roominess, were full of an air that suffocated; for the windows were never opened, and the atmosphere that the patients breathed had been sucked into the place by an immense system of forced ventilation, filtered until it seemed to have lost all its nature, heated, and then propelled through innumerable shafts into every corner of the building. In the basement of the hospital the machine that was responsible for this circulation of heated air made a melancholy groaning; and this sound made the whole structure seem more like an artificial assembly of matter than a real hospital with a personality and a soul.

It is possible that the teaching methods of the Infirmary were superior to those of Prince's; and the supporters of the institution prided themselves on the fact that the nursing staff was drawn from a higher social stratum; but for a long time Edwin felt considerably less at home there than he had been at the older hospital. The ward work, however, was even more fascinating, for the reason, no doubt, that his wonder was now tempered with a higher degree of erudition.

He found his new chief an inspiring figure. In the first place, the fact that he was a gentleman and a man of culture made him an effective contrast to that dynamic but plebeian genius, L.M. He was a graduate of one of the older universities, and though this counted for little in the mind of Edwin, who now affected to despise the city of his broken dream, it did lend an air of distinction to Sir Arthur Weldon's discourses. He had a quiet voice, an admirable manner with women patients or nurses, and beautiful hands, on one of which he wore a signet ring embellished with his crest and a motto which his presence merited: 'In toto teres atque rotundus.' The rotundity, it may be added, was so mild as to do no more than accentuate the elegance of a gold and platinum watch-chain that he wore. He was a great stickler for the traditions and dignity of his profession, and no word that was not infallibly correct disturbed the urbanity of his slow and polished periods. For this reason his tutorials in the wards were models of academic dignity, and much frequented by students who knew that he was far too anxious for the form of his discourse to break its continuity by asking awkward questions. He treated his clerks, and indeed every member of his classes, as if they were gentlemen nurtured in the same fine atmosphere as himself. He inspired confidence, and demanded nothing in return but correctness of behaviour and speech.

All these things made it easy to work for him; and the fact that over and above these social qualities he was a particularly sound physician, with a reputation that was already more than provincial, made Edwin sensible of the privilege of acting as his clerk.

His speciality was disease affecting the heart or lungs, and though his wards at the infirmary were open to all sorts of general medical cases, these two types of tragedy came most frequently under his care and Edwin's observation. Sir Arthur exacted from his clerks the preparation of accurate and voluminous notes on all his cases, and Edwin spent many hours in the wards extracting from his patients the details of family and medical history and moulding them into a balanced and intelligible report. The emotions that the study of the tubercle bacillus had aroused in him in the laboratory were reinforced a hundred times in the wards devoted to phthisical patients, too far advanced in dissolution for sanatorium treatment, that were his chief's especial care.

They were most of them creatures of intelligence and sensitiveness above the average of the hospital patient; their eyes shone between their long lashes with a light that may have been taken for that of inspiration in those of dead poets; even in the later stages of the disease, when their strength would hardly allow them to drag up their emaciated limbs in their beds, and their bodies were wrung nightly with devastating sweats or attacks of hæmorrhage that left them transparent and exhausted—even then they were so ready to be cheerful and to let their imagination blossom in vain hope, that Edwin found them the most pitiful of all his patients. The *spes phthisica* seemed to him the most pathetic as well as the most merciful of illusions.

In this ward he became acquainted with one patient in particular, a boy, the son of labouring parents whom heredity and circumstance alike had marked down from the day of his birth to be a victim of the disease. His mother and two sisters had died

of it, and all his short life had been spent in a labourer's cottage made deadly by the family's infection, at the sunless bottom of a wet Welsh valley.

As a child he had been too delicate to enjoy the fresh air that he would have breathed on the way to the village school. He had lived, as far as Edwin could make out, in the single room in which his mother had lain dying, and had learned to read and write at her side. Then she had died; and as soon as he was old enough he had been sent out to work on the farm where his father was employed, an occupation that might well have saved him if the work and the exposure had not been too severe, or if he had not returned at night to the infected hovel. As it was, in the rainy autumn weather of the hills, he had caught a chill and sickened with pleurisy, and thus the inevitable had happened.

He was only fifteen. Education had never come his way, and he had never read any books but the Confessions of Maria Monk and the family Bible; but whenever Edwin came to go over his chest and make the necessary report of progress—fallacious word—upon his case sheets, he noticed that the boy would hide a sheet of paper on which he had been writing. His confidence was easily won, and without the least shame he showed Edwin what he had been doing. He had spent his time in writing verses composed, for the most part, in the jingling measures of Moody and Sankey's hymns. They were sprinkled with strange dialect words that filled them with splashes of sombre colour; most of them were frankly ungrammatical; but there were things in some of them that seemed to Edwin to bear the same relation to poetry as

the mountain tricklings of that far hill country bore to the full stream of Severn. Their banalities, faintly imitated from the banalities of the hymn book, were occasionally relieved by phrases of pure beauty that caught the breath with surprise.

'Why do you do this?' Edwin asked, and when he had recovered from the shyness and diffidence into which the question had cast him, the boy told him that he wrote his verses because he couldn't help it, because the words became an obsession to him and would not let him sleep until they were written down. The thin flame of creative aspiration showed itself in other ways, in the patient's vivid delight in colours and sounds, and in the strange pictures, having no relation to nature, that he drew with coloured chalks.

It seemed to Edwin that in this case the exhaustion of chronic disease had revealed the existence, as it sometimes will, of a faint fire of natural genius. 'There, but for the spite of heaven,' he thought, 'goes John Keats,' and, with the feelings of an experimenter in explosives who mixes strange reagents, he lent his patient a copy of the poet's works.

The boy fell on them eagerly. He confessed that he did not understand them; but he would read them all day, mispronouncing the words as the classical student perhaps mispronounces those of the Greek poets, but extracting from their sonorous beauty a curious and vivid sensual satisfaction. A single line would sometimes throw him into a kind of trance, and he would lean back in his bed with the book open on his chest and his slender clubbed fingers clasped above it, repeating to himself his own version of the words without

any conception of their real meaning. Sometimes a line would fill him with memories :—

> 'Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
> Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
> Far from the fiery moon, and eve's one star . . .'

'That is like our home,' he would say.

The house-physician did not approve of these experiments. On principle he would have disapproved of poetry, and in this case he considered the reading of it unhealthy. As if there were any element of health in this misfortune! . . . A few weeks later the patient had an attack of hæmoptysis and died.

It was only in such cases of chronic illness that the question of the patient's intellectual state arose. Such speculations might mitigate the fatigue of slow siege warfare that had only one end in view, but the acute medical wards, and particularly those devoted to acute pneumonia, were the scene of shorter and more desperate conflicts, grapplings with death, in which the issue was doubtful and medicine could at least give support, and sometimes turn the tide.

These were indeed terrible battles, in which devoted nursing counted for much. To Edwin it was a sight more awe-inspiring than the quiet of death, to watch a strong man stretched upon his back, breathing terribly through the night-long struggles of pneumonia. In it he could see the most tremendous expression of a man's will to live, in the clenched hands, in the neck, knotted and swollen with intolerable strain, in the working of the muscles of the face and nose in their supreme thirst for air. The sound of this breathing would

fill the room that was otherwise so silent that one could hear the soft hiss of the oxygen escaping from its cylinder. The train of students that followed Sir Arthur round the wards would stand waiting in the doorway, knowing that nothing was to be seen, and the physician himself would step quietly to the square of red screens and exchange a whisper with the sister who stood at the patient's bedside, her lips compressed as though their muscles were contracting in sympathy with the other tortured muscles that she watched.

'Well, how is he?' the physician would ask.

'I think he's holding his own. No sleep.'

'That'a pity. Well, persevere with the brandy and the warm oxygen.'

'Yes, sir.' Her tense lips scarcely moved.

And then Edwin's chief, so quietly that the patient did not know what he was doing, being indeed no more than a mass of labouring muscles bent on life, would feel the temporal pulse in front of the ear with his firm white finger.

'Not so bad, sister . . . not so bad.'

Then he would sweep away with the tails of his frock-coat swinging.

'Ingleby, did you notice anything about the patient's hands?'

'His hands, sir?'

'Yes . . . his hands.'

'No, sir. Nothing, I'm afraid. I don't think he was plucking the bedclothes . . . carphology, do they call it?'

'You had better look the word up if you are not sure. No . . . it was a finer movement. He was rolling his thumbs over the tips of his index fingers, just like a man making pellets of bread at a dinner party. There are men who do that. Remember

it. It's a bad sign in a case of lobar pneumonia. Come along, gentlemen. The pneumococcus is a sporting antagonist. Short and sweet. I'd as soon die of pneumonia as anything and have a run for my money. That case has put up a good fight.'

That 'case' . . . On the face of it the use of the word seemed to justify the accusation of gross materialism that is so usually made against the profession of medicine. The patient who lay there fighting for his life was, in the physician's eyes, a case, and not, as Edwin, who had taken notes of his history in the earlier stages of the disease knew him to be, a bricklayer's labourer from Wolverbury with a wife and six children, two of whom had died in infancy. He was a case: a human body, the soulless body that Edwin had learned in detail through two years of labour in the dissecting room, consisting of a heart hard-pressed, a nervous system starved of oxygen and weakened by the virus of pneumonia, and a pair of clogged lungs. This was the whole truth as far as it concerned the physician. The calamity was a material calamity to be fought with material weapons, and the state of his soul, or his relations with his wife and the rest of the community in which he lived, only mattered in so far as they affected his body and revealed him to have been a clean-living and temperate man. For the rest he was a case; and it were well for the physician to leave the *animula, vagula, blandula* to the poets. This was one of the hard lessons of medicine.

These were sombre things; but it must not be imagined that they reflected the general tenour of hospital life. The Infirmary, indeed, was so vast as to be microcosmic, and its loves, its jealousies, and its ambitions combined to produce a broad effect of human comedy, not without tears, but leavened by

the rich, and often unprintable humour that flourished in the out-patient department. Hospital politics, hospital scandals, hospital romances, combined to make life a vivid and exciting experience. In the toils of the last, spring found W.G. securely bound. Harrop, too, had launched into a desperate affair with a probationer in the children's wards whom the matron promptly transferred to the infectious block and perpetual quarantine. Edwin and Boyce escaped this epidemic of tenderness that swept through the fourth year like measles. They were far too absorbed in their own interests and discoveries to worry their hearts about anything in a nurse's cap and apron.

Spring passed in a swift vision of plum-blossom in the Boyce's Alvaston garden and two weeks of musical debauchery, one Wagnerian and the other of Gilbert and Sullivan. Most of the time they were working at high pressure; but a week before the beginning of the fourth examination, Boyce proposed that they should cycle down together to the country house that his father rented in Gloucestershire, and blow away the vapours of forced ventilation with Cotswold air.

On the eve of an examination it seemed a daring but enthralling plan. Edwin put the proposal before Mr Ingleby, and was surprised to find that he didn't object. Indeed, it had seemed to Edwin for several months that his father was curiously distrait and less interested than usual in his work. This consent freed his conscience, and the two friends set off together on a Saturday afternoon in the spirit of abandoned holiday that is the highest privilege of youth. They had decided to take no medical books with them. As far as they were concerned, the examination might go hang;

for a whole week they would live with no thought for the morrow, taking long rides over the Cotswolds, lunching at village inns on bread and cheese, returning at night to feasts of beans and bacon and libations of Overton cider.

They started from the infirmary at half-past two, and had soon left the dust and tram-lines of North Bromwich behind. The smooth, wide road that they followed stretched in magnificent undulations over the heights of the Midland plateau from which they could see the shapes of Uffdown and Pen Beacon fading into the west under a pale, black-country sky. In front of them southward the sky was blue.

'We're in for ripping weather,' Boyce shouted as he rode ahead.

The weather didn't really matter: they were in for a great adventure. From the plateau they glided swiftly to the vale of Redditch, and when they had left that sordid little town behind they climbed the backbone of the Ridgway, where the road follows the thin crest of a line of small hills and overlooks on either side two dreaming plains. In a blue haze of summer these green dominions lay asleep, so richly scattered with dark woodlands that no human habitation could be seen. They were as lonely as the sky. Westward of Severn the Clees and Malverns towered over Wales; but Boyce appeared to be more interested in certain lower wooded hills upon the eastern side. He made Edwin the confidant of his latest romance.

'She and I,' he said, 'used to bicycle out from Alvaston in the cool of the evening . . . about an hour and a half's easy ride. It was early last summer. Those woods are full of nightingales. We used to sit on a gate and listen to them and

ride home together in the dark. I can tell you it was pretty wonderful.'

Of course it was wonderful. Everything must be wonderful in this enchanted country. Riding along in the afternoon sunlight Edwin constructed for himself just such another passionate adventure; and the figure with which he shared these imaginary ecstasies was, for want of a better, Dorothy Powys. While the dream nightingales were singing their hardest and he was on the point of renewing that unforgettable kiss, they came to a cottage half timbered and lost in clematis and honeysuckle where a steep road fell on either side at right angles to the ridge.

'Right,' shouted Boyce, 'we'll take the road down through the Lenches.'

'What are the Lenches?' said Edwin, riding abreast.

'Villages. Five of them, I think. There's Rous Lench and King's Lench and Abbot's Lench, and two others. They're a proper subject for a poem.'

'Right-o . . . let's collaborate,' said Edwin. How's this for a beginning?'

'As I was riding through the Lenches
I met three strapping country wenches.'

And laughing together, they constructed a series of frankly indecent couplets, recording the voyager's adventures with all three. It was a matter of the most complete collaboration, for the friends supplied alternate lines, outdoing one another in Rabelaisian extravagance. Edwin, however, provided the final couplet, which, he declared, gave the composition literary form :—

'Home to my vicarage I hasted
Feeling the day had not been wasted.'

'A parson of the type of Herrick,' said Boyce.

'Yes . . . but more serious.'

'That kind of affair *is* awfully serious . . . at the time.'

The gables of Evesham and its one tall tower swam in a golden dust. They drank cider in the inn courtyard, purchased a couple of Bath chaps at a grocer's and crossed the Avon. Through an orchard country they rode in that hour of evening when bird-song is most wistful. The sun went down in a blaze of splendour behind Bredon Hill. The perfume of a beanfield swept across the road.

'Good God, isn't it good?' said Boyce. 'We are nearly there.'

A village of Cotswold stone half hidden in blossoms of crimson rambler received them. The gardens were full of sweet-williams, pale phloxes, and tall hollyhocks. 'Straight on,' Boyce called.

A sign-post pointed up the hill to Overton. They dismounted, and pushed their bicycles up a steep lane in the twilight. Bats were flitting everywhere, and a buff-coloured owl fluttered heavily between the overarching elms. A faint tinkle of trickling water came to their ears.

'That is the sound of Overton,' said Boyce. 'Slow water trickling in the night.'

They slept together in the low-beamed room, so soundly that the sun was high before they wakened next morning.

The week that now followed was the very crown of youth. The Boyce's summer house stood upon a patch of terraced ground, being the highest of the three farms round which the hamlet of Overton

clustered, and overlooked the blossomy vale of Evesham bounded by the Cotswold escarpment, blue and dappled with the shadows of cloud. '*Parva domus: magna quies*,' read the motto that Matthew's father, the poet, had placed above the lintel of the door: 'small house: great quietness'—and indeed it seemed to Edwin that there could be no quieter place on earth.

He and Matthew would smoke their morning pipes together on a stone terrace that bleached in the sun along the edge of a garden that the poet had planted for perfume rather than for beauty of bloom. Here they would sit, nursing books that were unread, until the spirit tempted them to set out towards the blue escarpment, and, after a hard climb, lose themselves in the trough of some deep billow of Cotswold and fall asleep on a bank of waving grasses, or follow some runnel of the Leach or Windrush until it joined the mother stream, where they would strip and float over the shallows with the sun in their eyes, emerging covered with the tiny water leeches that gave one of the rivers its name.

On the height of Cotswold they found an inn that was half farm, possessing a barrel of cider that Edwin was almost ready to acknowledge as the equal of that which he had drunk in Somerset; and, for further attraction a huge yellow cat beneath the lazy stare of whose topaz eyes Matthew sat worshipping. In the evening the air that moved over the wolds grew cool and dry and more reviving than any juice of yellow apples, and with their lungs full of it they would spin down the winding hills into the plain, past many sweet-smelling villages and golden manor-houses, reaching Overton about sunset, when the evening stocks, that Mr Boyce had planted along the approaches to his

doorway, recovered from their lank indolence and drenched the air with a scent that matched the songs of nightingales.

There Mrs Pratt, the wife of a neighbouring labourer, would have their dinner ready: tender young beans and boiled bacon and crisp lettuce from the garden that Matthew dressed according to the directions of his epicurean father; and with their meal, and after, they would drink the dry and bitter cider made at the middle farm from the apples of orchards that now dreamed beneath them.

Then came music. The drawing-room piano stood by the open window, and a soft movement of air disturbed the flames of the candles in silver candlesticks that lighted the music stand. No other light was there; and in the gloom beyond, Edwin, playing the tender songs of Grieg and Schumann, and the prelude to Tristan, would see the long legs of Matthew stretched dreaming on a sofa. The nights were so silent that it seemed a pity to mar them with music; and for a long time Edwin would sit in silence at the piano, while strong winged moths fluttered in out of the darkness and circled round the candle's flame. Last of all, before they turned in, they would go for a slow walk over meadows cool in the moonlight, listening to the silence—'Solemn midnight's tingling silentness,' Matthew quoted—or to the gentle creaking of the branches of elms, now heavy with foliage, that embosomed their small house.

The last day of their holiday was wet; but that made no great difference to them, for a succession of showers drew from the drenched garden a perfume more intense. They spent the day in musical exploration, and when the darkness came they sat together talking far into the night. They talked

of North Bromwich, for the ponderable influence of the morrow had already invaded their quietude, and of their future work.

'In a year's time,' said Edwin, 'we shall be qualified.'

'What shall you do?'

'Oh, general practice, I suppose. That's the easiest way to make a living. It's what most men do.'

'I don't like the idea of it,' said Matthew. 'It's sordid, unsatisfactory work. A hard living in which science stands no chance. Selling bottles of medicine—quite harmless, of course, but unnecessary—to people who don't really need them. You have to do it to make a living. If you don't the other people cut you out.'

'I don't think it's as bad as that. There must be something fundamentally good about medical practice. You are actually helping the people who are genuinely ill.'

'That's the ideal side of it. But there's another. I don't think I shall risk it. If the governor can't let me have enough money to wait for consulting practice, I shall have a shot at one of the services. I think the Indian Medical Service is the thing. Fairly good pay, a chance of seeing the world, and a good sporting life.'

'India——?' Edwin had never thought of it. Sitting there in an English dusk the idea appealed to him. Great rivers: burning plains under the icy rampart of Himalaya: strange, dark religions. India. . . Yes, it sounded good. His imagination went a little farther ahead. A hill-station according to Kipling, or perhaps a more solitary cantonment in the plains where the commandant was a major in the Indian army and the wife of the commandant, a girl whose name had once been Dorothy Powys.

And the major, of course, would succumb to some pernicious tropical disease through which Edwin would nurse him devotedly; and when he was dead and buried his beautiful wife would come to Edwin—the only other Englishman in the station, and say: 'I never really loved him. I never really loved any one but you.' Altogether an extremely romantic prospect. . . . Yes, the Indian Medical Service would do very well. . . .

The last night was more beautiful in its silence than any other. It had been a wonderful week. There would never be another like it. The crown of youth. And, as it came to pass, the end of youth as well.

IV

It was late that night when Edwin reached home. After the huge openness of the Cotswold expanses, the air of Halesby, lying deep in its valley, seemed to him confined and oppressive, and to add to this impression there was a sense of thunder in it. After supper his father went to his writing desk and pulled out a sheaf of bluish, translucent papers which he spread out on the table, and began to study intently. Edwin, sprawling, tired and contented, in the corner, watched him lazily.

'Whatever have you got there, father?' he said.

'Plans . . . architect's plans,' Mr Ingleby replied nervously.

'Plans? What for? Surely you aren't thinking of building a new house.'

'Well, not exactly. No . . . I am thinking of adding to this one.'

'But that would be an expensive job. Isn't it big enough for us?'

'Yes. It's big enough at present; but it may not be shortly.'

'What do you mean?'

Edwin laughed uneasily, for he could not understand this air of mystery. Mr Ingleby rose from his plans and cleared his throat. The little lamp-lit room immediately became full of an atmosphere of suppressed intensity, in which the tick of the clock could be heard as if it were consciously calling attention to the importance of the moment.

'I mean. . . . As a matter of fact, I had intended telling you this evening; but I found it difficult to do so, because . . . because I could not be quite sure how you'd take it. It . . . it may come as a shock to you. I am thinking of enlarging the house because I am proposing to be married again.'

'Married? Good God!'

A feeling of inexplicable passion choked Edwin so that his voice did not sound as if it were his own.

'Yes, I knew it would come as a surprise to you. Probably you'll find it difficult to understand my feelings. You mustn't be hasty.'

'Good God!' Edwin's amazement could find no other words.

'You are the first person I have told, Edwin. I've thought a good deal about it . . . about you particularly, and I've quite satisfied myself that I am not doing you any injustice. In another year I suppose you will be going out into the world and leaving me. Don't decide what you think too hastily.'

He paused, but Edwin could not speak.

'If you'll listen, I'll tell you all about it. I think you will approve of my choice. I'll tell you——'

'For God's sake, don't. Not now——'

'Very well. As you wish.' Mr Ingleby's hands that held the architect's papers trembled. He smiled, kindly, but with a sort of bewilderment. 'As you wish,' he repeated.

And Edwin, feeling as if he would do something ridiculous and violent in the stress of the curiously mingled emotions that possessed him, went quickly to the door and ran upstairs to his room, where he flung himself on his bed in the dark.

In a little while he found himself, ridiculously, sobbing. He could not define the passionate mixture of resentment, jealousy, shame, and even hatred, that overwhelmed him. He could not understand himself. A psycho-analyst, no doubt would have found a name for his state of mind, describing it as an 'Œdipus complex'; but Edwin had never heard of psycho-analysis, and only knew that his mind was ruthlessly torn by passions beyond the control of reason. He made a valiant attempt to think rationally. Primarily, he admitted, it wasn't his business to decide whether his father should marry again or remain a widower. His father was a free agent with responsibilities towards Edwin that were rapidly vanishing and would soon be ended. He couldn't even suggest that this new marriage would be the ruin of any vital comradeship between them, for the hopes of this ideal state that he had once cherished, had not been realised during the last few years. There was no reason why his father's marriage should affect him personally, or even financially, for he had never reckoned on the least paternal support when once he should be qualified. There was not even the least suggestion that his father was physically unsuitable for the married state, for there was no reason why he should not live for many years to

come. There were actually valid arguments, that Edwin could not dispute, in favour of the plan—such as Mr Ingleby's loneliness, soon to be increased, and the discomfort that he had suffered as an elderly widower at the hands of a series of inefficient house-keepers. From every point of view the world would be justified in concluding that he was doing the correct and obvious thing. Why, then, should Edwin lie on his bed in the dark wetting his pillow with tears, and sick with shame?

No reason could assuage his suffering. However calmly he tried to consider the matter, the thought of his mother rose up in his mind; a vision of her, beautiful and pathetic, and indefinitely wronged, came to reinforce his indignation. He lit a candle and gazed for a long time at her photograph, the one that he had always kept in his desk at St Luke's and scarcely noticed for the last three years; and though he knew that she was dead and presumably beyond the reach of any human passion, the sight of her features filled him more than ever with this unconscionable resentment so devastating in its intensity. The portrait took him back to the tenderness that he remembered at the time of her death, and particularly that strange moment when he and his father had knelt together in the little room across the landing. The smell of Sanitas. . . .

And then he remembered another incident in the gloom of that brown room at the Holloway on the windy crown of Mendip, whence he had seen all the kingdoms of the earth. Thinking of this, he seemed to hear the voice of a very old woman, who said, 'The Inglebys are always very tender in marriage. I've seen many of them that have lost their wives, and they always marry again.'

How could she have known? And then the thought of a strange woman in the house, treading in the places where his mother's steps had once moved, swept him off his feet again.

'I could never stay here,' he thought. 'I could never stay here. . . . I should do something desperate and cruel and unreasonable. I couldn't help myself. I must go. It's a pity . . . but I must go. I couldn't stay here. I simply couldn't.'

With this determination in his mind, but without the least idea of the way in which it might be realised, he arrived at a state of comparative serenity, in which he could contemplate his mother's photograph without so much passionate resentment at the slur that was being laid on her memory. Now he saw everything in terms of his new resolution. He saw, pathetically, the little bed in which he had slept for so many years, the shelves on which his favourite books were ranged, the piano and the sheaves of his mother's music that he had managed to install in his room: all the small details that went together to create its atmosphere of homeliness.

'How the devil shall I manage to leave them?' he thought. He went to the window and saw, beyond the garden trees, the low line of those familiar hills: the landscape that he had always delighted in as his own, and that now was to be his no longer. He sighed, for to leave them seemed to him impossible; they were so familiar, so much a definite part of his life. A curious impulse seized him to creep downstairs and out of the house, and visit the grave in the cemetery where his mother was laid; but he restrained himself from this debauch of sentiment. 'It will do no good,' he thought. 'It's all over.' He even wondered if he might feel happier if he went down to Aunt Laura's house

and confided in her: perhaps she would understand. At least she was his mother's sister and might be conscious of the indignity; but when he had almost determined to do this, he reflected that she and his uncle were probably in bed, and a ludicrous picture of her putting her head out of the window to ask what was the matter, with her hair in curling pins, restrained him. Besides, it would be rather ridiculous to fall back upon the sympathies of a person whom he had neglected for several years.

'No. . . . I must go on my own way,' he thought. 'It's a sort of break in my life, just like the big break before. It's got to be faced, and it's no good worrying about it.'

He suddenly remembered that in twelve hours' time he would be sitting for his fourth examination, and that it would be wise for him to get some sleep; so he undressed and went to bed, wondering how many more times he would undress in that little room and caring less than he would have expected. He fell asleep soon, for he was thoroughly tired out, and slept so soundly that he did not see his father enter the room a few hours later. He came in softly, in his dressing-gown, carrying a candle, and stooped above Edwin's sleeping figure with troubled eyes.

CHAPTER VIII

LOWER SPARKDALE

I

NEXT day, in a fever of restlessness, Edwin essayed and passed his fourth professional examination. He had expected to get a first-class in it, but when he found himself near the bottom of the list in the neighbourhood of W.G., he was not seriously disturbed. The subjects of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology were unimportant, and now that his life had taken this sudden change of direction, it did not much matter what sort of a degree he took. His one concern was to get qualified and licensed to earn his living on the bodies of his fellow-men as quickly as possible.

Since his interview with his father, the determination to leave Halesby had not faltered, although he had not then calculated the difficulties that now faced him. To begin with, he had no money beyond a few pounds that his mother had placed to his credit in the Post Office Savings Bank in his childhood. Luckily his college and hospital fees had been paid in advance, and he was only concerned with the actual cost of living and the fees for the final examination. In some way or other he would have to live for twelve months, and he smiled to himself to think that he was in very much the same position as his father had occupied thirty years before.

On the whole, he thought, his father must have had less cause for anxiety, with Dr Marshall's two hundred pounds behind him and the humble

standards of a village boy in place of Edwin's more elaborate traditions of life. He felt that he needed the advice of a sound man with some knowledge of the world. In an emergency of this kind Matthew Boyce could offer him very little but sympathy, and so he turned naturally to the counsels of that battered warrior, W.G., feeling, at the same time, rather shabby in making use of a friend whom he had practically neglected in the last two years.

W.G. providentially didn't look at it in that light. He had always regarded Edwin from a fatherly standpoint, and the mere fact that this was a case of rebellion against domestic authority of the kind in which he had been engaged since his childhood made him sympathetic, though he didn't, as Edwin saw to his despair, appreciate the delicacies of the situation.

'I can quite see why you want to cut adrift,' he said. 'It's a feeling that any one's who's dependent gets, if he has any guts in him; but I'm damned if I see any cause or just impediment why these two persons shouldn't enter into holy matrimony.'

'I suppose it's just rotten sentimentality. Still . . . I can't help it. There it is. It's the idea of seeing another woman in my mother's place. I simply couldn't stick it, W.G.'

'Well, old chap, I'm quite prepared to believe you know best. The thing is, what are you going to do? You can't live on nothing in this hard world. You can share my bed for a week or two if you like. I'm sorry it won't be for longer; but marriage appears to be in the air. To tell you the truth, I'm going to get married myself.'

'You married? . . . Good Lord! What on earth are you doing that for?'

'I don't know. Force of circumstance, I suppose. It's one of the things that happens when you least expect it.

'Do I know her, W.G.?'

'Oh, yes . . . you know her. It's Sister Merrion in Number Twelve.'

There came to Edwin a vision of a tall, dark girl, with wavy brown hair and Irish eyes, whom he couldn't help remembering at the infirmary.

'I didn't even know that you were friendly.'

'We weren't until about three weeks ago. I happened to notice that she was looking rather down in the mouth, and took her out to tea; and then the poor girl broke down at the Dousita and told me all about her home affairs. It's the devil and all to see a pretty girl like that crying. She'd been having a thin time of it at home with her father: a pretty rotten sort of fellow, I gathered, and that seemed the only way out of it. So we're going to be married next month. A sort of fellow-feeling, you know.'

'But. . . . Good Lord . . . are you in love with her?'

'Of course I am, you old ass. I shouldn't marry her if I wasn't. It'll be a bit of a pinch till I'm qualified, though.'

'I say, I hope you'll be happy.'

A sudden pang of something like envy overwhelmed Edwin. The picture of settled peace, romantic love in a cottage, that W.G. was about to share with the undeniably beautiful Sister Merrion struck him as an ideal state.

'You're a lucky devil, W.G.,' he said.

It seemed unreasonable that W.G. should devote himself to the smaller problem of Edwin's ways and means on the eve of such a momentous

adventure. It hardly seemed fair to bother him.

'We're going into rooms in Alvaston at first,' he said. 'It'll be less expensive than furnishing, and we don't intend to indulge in a family for the present. Meanwhile, if I were you, I should go and talk to the manager at Edmondson's. He may be able to put you on to something. Yes . . . have a shot at him first, and mention my name, he's a very decent sort.'

Edwin laughed to himself. It seemed to him that he was in the grip of a curiously ironical fate, for Edmondson's was the identical firm of wholesale druggists with whom his father had been employed on his first arrival at North Bromwich. History was repeating itself in a way that was proper to romance.

In the afternoon he went down to Edmondson's and asked for the manager, a vigorous person with shrewd eyes that he screwed up habitually whenever he made a point in his conversation. He called Edwin 'Doctor': a form of address that was flattering, until Edwin realised that it was no more than a habit with him. 'Ingleby,' he said; 'let me see, I know the name.'

'Probably you know my father. He's in business at Halesby.'

'Ah, yes, of course . . . your father. Come along to my room, doctor, and have a cigar.'

In this varnished chamber, decorated with a collection of barbarous surgical instruments, survivals of the Middle Ages, Edwin unbosomed himself. The manager listened in silence, screwing up his eyes from time to time to show that he was taking in Edwin's story.

'Well,' he said at the end of it. 'Do you want

me to tell you what I think of it, doctor? Candidly, you know.'

Edwin was only too anxious for another opinion.

'Well, I think you don't know when you're well off. To tell you the truth, doctor, I think you're a damned fool. That's straight. See?'

'I'm not surprised,' said Edwin. 'Still, I've made up my mind. I'm not going to stay at home. I can't do it, that's all. I'm only wondering if you can put me in the way of a job of some kind.'

'Well, doctor, that's easier said than done. When you're qualified, it'll be a different matter altogether. I think I can promise to keep you in 'locums' at four or five guineas a week, as long as you like to take them; but I can't honestly say there's anything for you at present. It's not like the old days when doctors were allowed to keep unqualified assistants.'

'I'm through my fourth exam, you know. I could do dispensing.'

'Dispensing. . . . Yes, I hadn't thought of that. Well, doctor, I'll see what I can do for you. You know what I think of it, don't you? In the meantime you'd better leave your address. No good writing to Halesby, I suppose?'

Edwin gave him the address of W.G.'s diggings, and went off, hopelessly discouraged, to find his friend. W.G., however, was at present far too engrossed in the charms of Sister Merrion to be available. So Edwin went on to the Boyce's house in Alvaston, only to find that Matthew had cycled down to Overton again with his father. It was impossible for him to settle to any work; so he took an afternoon train to Halesby, at a time when he knew his father would be busy at the shop,

and collected the few belongings that he felt he must take with him.

The atmosphere of the house was inexpressibly poignant. Within its walls, he reflected, dwelt the ghost of all his childhood, and memories of his mother, that had lain submerged in his consciousness for many years, rose to meet him wherever he went. Well, he would never see the place again. This exile, it pleased him to think, was his final sacrifice to her memory. That was the best way in which he could express it. At the worst, another voice whispered, it was an excess of mawkish sentiment.

All through the afternoon, and particularly when he disinterred small pieces of the lumber that he had collected in his schooldays, this sense of a ghostly childhood haunted him. It followed him down the stairs into the hall, where the grandfather clock ticked steadily as it had ticked ever since he could remember, into the dead drawing-room, soon to be made alive by the tastes of another feminine personality; on the lawn, where the limes were shedding their sticky bloom; on the way to the station, when he lugged his bag through the gnarled shadows of Mrs Barrow's ancient garden, and caught a glimpse of the old lady's kindly nodding bonnet as she smiled at him from her place in the window, where she sat hermetically sealed in an atmosphere of Victorian decay.

There were the reedy pools and Shenstone's hanging woods, ghostly waters and woodlands, never to be seen again. And there was the platform of Halesby station, reeking of hot coal dust and ashes, and, from the incoming train, a flux of shabby people, including the bank-clerk in tennis

flannels and the mysterious commercial traveller with the brown leather bag, reading the *Pink 'Un* as he walked. From this, through the black-country's familiar desert, the train carried him into the bitter reality of North Bromwich. With something approaching the feelings of an intruder he installed himself in W.G.'s diggings, and made a supper, undeniably pleasant, of bread and cheese with a large bottle of W.G.'s beer. The latter, which happened to be Astill's XXXX, induced a mood of tolerant sleepiness, and luckily prepared him to receive, at midnight or thereabouts, the confidences of his friend on the subject of Sister Merrion's intellectual charms.

'You know, old chap, she's different from me—reads poetry by the hour when she's in the bunk on night duty. Longfellow's her favourite. A long way above my head and all that; but it's a wonderful thing, when you come to think of it, to be married to an intellectual woman. . . .' So the words poured into Edwin's drowsy ears. He was far too sleepy to smile, and, Longfellow apart, it did seem to him a comfortable and even enviable thing to be the adored centre of the universe in the Irish eyes of a tender creature with wavy brown hair and a painful domestic tragedy. W.G. was still moralising on his past wickedness and the prospect of a blameless future when Edwin fell asleep.

II

Next morning he was awakened by his friend, boisterous and ruddy from a bath, performing a strange ritual of prostrations and contortions in front of an open window discreetly veiled with

fluttering butter-muslin. Edwin lazily watched the sinuous play of muscles under the shaggy limbs of W.G. through half-closed eyelids.

'You'd make a topping subject for dissection, W.G.,' he said.

'Hallo!' W.G. answered from between his legs. 'You awake, you old slacker? There's a letter for you that came up with the tea. Tea's cold, by the way.'

'Thanks,' said Edwin, as W.G. skimmed the letter over to him. 'Good Lord, it's from Edmondson's.'

It was a note hastily scribbled advising Edwin to go at once and see Dr Altrincham-Harris at 563 Lower Sparkdale, North Bromwich, between nine and ten a.m., or six and nine p.m., and signed by the manager who screwed his eyes up.

'Five hundred and sixty-three, Lower Sparkdale,' Edwin groaned. 'I say, that sounds pretty bad. Altrincham-Harris is rather hot stuff for Lower Sparkdale, isn't it? Queer place for a double-barreler.'

'General practitioner,' said W.G., rubbing himself down with a pair of flesh-gloves. 'They all go in for hyphens. It impresses the lower-middle classes. When I go into practice, my son, I shall be known as Doctor William George-Brown, if I can afford the extra letters on a plate.'

'Lower Sparkdale's a pretty awful slum, isn't it?'

'Never been there. It's time you cleared off to the bathroom. You'll feel better when you're awake.'

Edwin spent the morning in writing, and four times rewriting, a letter to his father. It was a difficult job, for he felt that the reasons for his departure could not be explained in words, and

he was particularly anxious to make it clear that it was purely a matter of temperament and that he didn't wish it to imply any criticism of Mr Ingleby's plans. When he had finished it he found that it was far too late to visit the surgery of Dr Altrincham-Harris. He therefore waited till the evening, and then took a steam-tram through a succession of sordid streets, past the public abbattoirs and the newly-opened Rowton House, to the level of 563 Lower Sparkdale.

The extreme end of that street was not as bad as he had imagined it might be, for at this point the slum ended, resolving itself into the edge of a growing suburb of red-brick. Number 563 was a corner house secretively curtained with dirty muslin on flat brass rods A shining plate revealed the qualifications, such as they were, of C. Altrincham-Harris, Physician and Surgeon, and as the front door seemed to have sunk into a state of disuse, Edwin entered at another, marked 'Surgery,' round which a number of poorly-clad women, some of them carrying babies, were clustered.

Inside the door was a narrow waiting-room that concentrated into an incredibly small number of cubic feet the characteristic odour of an out-patient department. Every seat was occupied, and Edwin, deciding to wait for his turn, stood listening to a varied recitation of medical history that every patient seemed compelled by the surroundings to relate to her neighbour. At the moment when he entered a very stout woman, who had been drinking, had the ear of the company, talking loudly over the shoulder of a pasty child whose neck was covered with the pin-points that fleas make on an insensitive skin, and occasionally, in accessions of tenderness, hugging it to her bosom.

'So I says to the inspector . . . yes, inspector, 'e 'ad the nerve to call 'isself . . . says I, you can take your summonses to 'ell, I says. I *love* my children, I says. There's more love for the little 'armless things in my finger than there'll ever be in your bloody body, I says. And I caught 'er up and carried 'er straight along 'ere to the doctor. Doctor 'Arris knows me, I says, and what's more 'e shall 'ave a look at Margaret's 'ead with 'is own eyes. Shan't 'e, my pretty?' The child wriggled as she was clasped in another beery embrace.

A bell tingled inside. 'Now we shall see,' said the lady determinedly rising. 'And 'ave a stiffi-cate if it costs me two shillin's.'

The room murmured low applause and sympathy, and she entered the surgery, emerging, two minutes later, with the testimonial in her mouth.

'What did I tell yo'?' she said. 'The doctor says their ain't one. Not *one*. It's time these inspectors was done away with. I only 'ope 'e will summons me. Good-night, all.'

She went out, hugging the child in both arms, and a pale woman, respectably dressed, who had sat through her tirades in silence, took her place in the doctor's consulting room. Dr Altrincham-Harris didn't keep her long. She came out, like the rest of them, after an interview that lasted perhaps two minutes, carrying a bottle of medicine wrapped up in one of the papers that are called comic. Again the bell rang.

'Good God,' Edwin thought, 'and this is general practice!' It was evident that he had entered a world in which the academic methods of diagnosis and prescription with which he had been educated were not followed. On the surface it was quite

clear that the physician could not have given an eighth part of the usual time or care to the consideration of any single case. He remembered instances of hospital patients who had affected to despise the perfunctoriness of the methods of the Prince's out-patient department, and had boasted that they would receive better attention from the hands of a 'private doctor.' He hoped to goodness that none of these unfortunate people would drift into the hands of Dr Altrincham-Harris.

His own turn came, and relieved to be rid of the stink of the waiting-room, he entered the surgery. Dr Harris was sitting in an attitude of impatience behind a desk littered with papers. He was a little man, with grey, untidy hair and a drooping moustache. He held a pencil in his hand, as if he were itching to dash off another prescription, and an open drawer in the desk at his right hand was full of small silver. When he saw that Edwin was better dressed than the majority of his patients, his manner changed at once. 'Please sit down,' he said. 'Now, what can I do for you?'

Edwin hesitated, for he found it difficult to begin. Dr Harris encouraged him with a wink, and a grip of his left arm.

'Now, my boy, you needn't be frightened of me. You'll find the doctor's your best friend. Had a bit of bad luck, eh? Well, you're not the first, and you won't be the last.'

The wink was the most disgusting part of this performance, but Edwin, quickly recovering his sense of humour, pulled out Edmondson's letter and handed it to the doctor.

'Well, now, why didn't you say so at first,' said Dr Harris, scratching a bristly grey chin. Yes . . . I did mention to their manager that I was in want

of some one to do a bit of rough dispensing and keep this place tidy. You see I don't live here. It's what we call a lock-up, and the work's so pressing that I've really no time to do my own dispensing. I suppose you hold the Apothecaries' Hall Diploma —passed your exams and that?'

'No . . . I'm a medical student. I took pharmacology in my last exam. I'm in my final year.'

'H'm . . . I shouldn't have thought it. You look very young. Final year . . .' Then his eyes brightened. 'Have you done your midwifery yet?'

'No, I shall do that later in the year.'

'That's a pity . . . a pity. You could have been very useful to me in that way, keeping cases going, you know, so that I could be in at the finish. I could do twice the amount of midwifery that I do now if I had some one to keep an eye on them. Before the General Medical Council did away with unqualified assistants, I used to keep three of them: paid me well, too. Now I've got to do everything myself. It's a dog's life, but there's money in it, I don't mind telling you. Well, there's no time to waste. What do you want?'

'I want a place to live in and my keep, and just enough money to keep me going till I'm qualified. That's all. You'll understand . . . I'm on my own, and I've just about ten pounds to carry me over a year. I hope you can give me a job.'

'I suppose you could take a hand with dressings and things like that?'

Edwin saw that the little man was out for bargaining, but as long as he could feel that something was being settled he didn't really mind.

'Yes . . . I can do anything you like to use me

for in your surgery hours. I can't promise more. You see, I have to pass my final.'

'You can learn a lot of useful things about general practice here,' said Dr Harris. 'It should be extremely useful to you. You see, I've been at this game for thirty years. It's a great chance for you.' He took up a handful of silver from the open drawer and started to jingle it. 'Look here, you're wasting time.'

Edwin agreed.

'Well, suppose I take you on, I might be able to give you three . . . better say two pounds a month. You can feed up at my place and sleep here. If you sleep here, you'll be able to take night-messages and telephone them up to me. There's a bedroom fitted up. One of my assistants used to sleep here. How will that suit you?'

With a feeling of intense relief Edwin accepted.

'Very well, then, there's no reason why you shouldn't begin at once, just to get into the way of things.' He paused, and added as an after-thought: 'We'll count that you start from to-morrow.'

He led Edwin behind the green baize curtain at the back of his desk, disclosing a set of shelves and a counter stained with the rings of bottles and measuring glasses. At the end of the counter was a sink into which a tap with a tapered nozzle dripped dismally. One drawer held labels, another corks, a third a selection of eight-ounce, four-ounce, and two-ounce bottles. At the back of the counter stood a row of Winchester Quarts, of indefinite contents, labelled with the Roman numerals from one to nine. Dr Harris swabbed the swimming counter with a rag that was already saturated with medicines.

'You can learn all you want in five minutes,' he said. 'There's no time for refinements in this sort of practice. These big bottles are all stock mixtures, and whatever they teach you in your universities, I can tell you that these nine mixtures will carry you through life. There you are . . . Number One: White Mixture. Number Two: Soda and Rhubarb. Number Three: Bismuth. You have to go easy with Number Three: Bismuth's expensive. Number Four: Febrifuge . . . Liquor Ammond Acet: and that. Number Five: Iron and Mag.: Sulph. And so on. . . . Number Nine: Mercury and Pot: Iod . . . you know what that's for,' with a laugh, 'we use a lot of that here. Now you've one ounce of each stock mixture to an eight-ounce bottle, and a two-tablespoonful dose. I used to put them up in six-ounce bottles; but if you give them eight ounces they think they're getting more for the money: they don't realise they're getting eight doses instead of twelve, and that's their look-out, isn't it? Same proportions for children and infants, only you use the four and two-ounce bottles instead, with dessert-spoon and teaspoonful doses. Simple, isn't it? But you want to simplify if you're going to make money in these days. Now, is that quite clear?'

'Quite clear.'

'Well, then, when a patient comes in I have a look at him—with my experience you can tell in a moment—and I give you a slip of paper behind the curtain. Like this. "Mrs Jones. No. 5. T.D.S." Mrs means an eight-ounce bottle. One ounce of Number Five stock mixture. One tablespoonful three times a day. Then, if I put "4tis horis" instead of "T.D.S.,' it means a tablespoonful every four hours; but I only do that when I see they can

afford to get through the bottle more quickly. You'll find powders in that drawer. Antifebrin—it's cheaper than phenacetin and caffein. And calomel for children. Then, as I was saying, while I have a look at the patient and ask him one or two questions you make up the medicine.'

'Suppose, when you've had a talk to him, you change your mind about the treatment.'

'I never change my mind. There's no time for that,' said Dr Harris. 'And if I did we could change the medicine next time. But you needn't worry about the treatment: that's my part of the business. Why'—and the little man expanded—'I shouldn't wonder if we got through as many as a hundred patients in a couple of hours, the two of us together. Now, are you ready?'

He left Edwin behind the curtain and rang his bell. A patient entered, and as soon as the doctor had said good-evening to her the prescription was passed behind the curtain and Edwin proceeded to fill a bottle from one of the Winchester Quarts. This business went on monotonously for another hour. Edwin dispensed mechanically in a kind of dream. He never saw a single patient; but little scraps of conversation showed him that most of them were suffering from the evils of poor housing and a sedentary life. It consoled him to think that most of the mixtures that he dispensed were relatively harmless. Sometimes, by an access of solicitude and deference in the doctor's voice, he could gather that the patient was of a higher social degree, and he smiled to find, in these cases, that the mixture was invariably prescribed in four-hourly doses.

All the men, it appeared, were judged to be in need of White Mixture or Rhubarb: all the women demanded Iron and Mag: Sulph: all the children

were treated with a treacly cough mixture or calomel powders. In the space of an hour he must have dispensed at least forty bottles of medicine, and towards the end of the evening he noticed that Dr Harris became even more perfunctory in his examinations—if such a word were ever justified—and that signs of irritation began to show themselves in his voice. At last the waiting-room bell rang twice, and no patient appeared.

'That's the lot,' said Dr Harris, appearing from behind the curtain. 'I think I'll have a wash.' It was the first time that he had washed his hands in the whole of the evening. 'Well, you see what it's like,' he said, 'I think I'll have a nip of whisky.' He produced a vitriolic bottle from a cupboard and mixed some whisky with water in a medicine-measure.

'A good average day,' he said. 'Three pounds ten.' He shovelled the silver from the drawer into a leather bag that weighed down his coat pocket. 'That takes a lot of making at a shilling a time. Well, how do you like it?'

'I think I shall be able to manage,' said Edwin, who was not anxious to commit himself.

'You'd better come and see your room.'

It was a bare bedroom on the first floor with iron bedstead and a dejected washhand-stand, but it seemed to Edwin that, at least, it would be quiet and free from distractions. 'I shall be able to read here,' he thought, 'and after all, it's only for twelve months.'

'Not much to look at,' said Dr Harris apologetically. 'I'll send you down some bedding to-night. I'll expect you for breakfast at eight o'clock sharp. You'd better come along and have some supper now.'

'I think I'd better go and collect some of my

things. I've been staying with a friend in his diggings.'

'All right. As you like,' said Dr Harris. 'Nine o'clock sharp to-morrow morning then? You have to be punctual if you're to make money in this business.'

Edwin said good-night, keeping the key of the surgery. When the doctor had gone he went back into the curtained dispensary and tried to introduce a little order into the waste. A strange life, he thought . . . a strange and degrading life. If this were general practice, he wondered why he had ever despised his father's trade, for surely there was more dignity in selling tooth-brushes than in dealing so casually with the diseases of human beings. 'I must talk it over with old W.G.,' he thought. 'He's a sound man.' But he knew at the bottom of his heart that he couldn't afford to speculate on the ethics of the case. All that mattered to him, for the present, was the necessity of finding a roof—any roof to shelter him and food to keep him alive. He was a beggar, and could not choose, and had every reason to be thankful for this or any solution of his difficulties.

'It sounds bad,' said W.G., when Edwin had expanded on the refinements of Dr Harris's medicine, 'but, in a way, you're lucky to have fallen on your feet so quickly. As a matter of fact, you don't deserve it. You're an old fool to have left home, you know. Now, there's some chance of your appreciating how comfortable you were.'

Boyce was more sympathetic, entering with great pains and seriousness into the cause of Edwin's spiritual nausea. The results of it pleased him in so far as they meant that in future Edwin would be living in North Bromwich, and promised a

perpetuation of the delightful comradeship that that they had enjoyed in the summer. 'I expect we shall see a lot of you, old boy,' he said, 'ambrosial evenings, you know.'

Edwin laughed. 'The evenings won't be exactly ambrosial. I shall be earning my two pounds a month filling eight-ounce bottles with rubbish at a shilling each. I shall feel like compounding in a felony. It's the devil . . .'

III

And it was pretty bad. No more concerts or operas; no week-ends at Overton; no dinners at Joey's; no possible diversion of any kind that impinged upon the hours between six and nine. And yet Edwin was happy. For the first time in his life, and at a price, he was realising what independence meant. Even the break at Halesby had passed off without any severe emotional disturbance. He had written to his father again, telling him his new address and what he was doing, and his father had replied in his formal business hand, not, indeed, with any offer of help, but with an implied approval of what he had done, enclosing a number of bills (opened) and a couple of second-hand book catalogues.

There was nothing unfriendly in the letter, no heroics of outraged paternity. Reading between the lines, Edwin felt that by consulting no interests but his own he had made an awkward situation easy for his father. In that case, he reflected, Mr Ingleby might very well have made him an allowance. It gave him a sense of grim satisfaction to remember that he was still a minor and

that even if he were too proud to use it, he still held the weapon of his father's legal responsibility in reserve, but the next moment he was ashamed of this reflection: when it came to a point the element of pathos in his father's history and person always disarmed him.

It was enough that he should be happy, principally for the reason that his days were so full and any moments of relaxation came to him with a more poignant pleasure than any he had known before. He had very little time for reading outside the subjects of his final exam, that now overwhelmed him with an increasing weight. For pleasure he read little but lyrical poetry, finding his chief enjoyment in the last hour before he fell asleep in Dr Harris's empty lock-up, with a copy of Mackail's selections from the Greek Anthology that he had salved from one of the second-hand bookstalls in Cobden Street.

In spite of himself, he was beginning to like Charles Altrincham-Harris. He didn't for one moment alter his opinion of the degradation to which the man had subjected the nobilities of his calling, his meanness and his avarice. In his dealings with the unfortunate people who came to the shilling doctor for treatment, he still abhorred him; he knew him to be a person whose mind was a sink of pseudo-professional prurience, and whose body and habits were unkempt and unclean; but for all this, he could not deny the fact that in his relations with his dispenser he displayed a curious vein of natural kindness, and that his ideals, apart from his loathsome business, were of a touching simplicity.

Every morning they met at breakfast. The doctor believed in good food as a basis for work,

and his housekeeper, a small, shrewish woman of fifty, was an excellent cook. At the breakfast table he would impart to Edwin the more salacious paragraphs of the morning paper, which he always opened at the page that contained the records of the divorce-court. He took no notice of politics. 'They can do what they like as long as they don't legislate about *us*.' And though Edwin felt sincerely that the sooner his kind were legislated for, the better, he was thankful that his employer was not a political bore or bigot.

After breakfast Dr Harris always smoked a clay pipe in his carpet slippers, a present from a patient who, for some unimaginable reason, had been grateful. Then they would walk down to 563 Lower Sparkdale together in the fresh morning air, and the combination of gentle exercise with deeper breathing would impel the little man to make Edwin the confidant of his ambitions.

'Twelve thousand pounds,' he would say, 'that's all I want. Twelve thousand pounds. Five hundred a year. Then I shall find a quiet little place in the country and have a rest. Keep bees and poultry: that's what I shall do, and smoke a pipe in the garden in the evening when the poor devil that buys my practice is going down to the surgery to rake in the shillings.'

In these moments he would reflect on the beginning of his career. 'I took a good degree, you know. You wouldn't think it to look at me now, would you? No . . . I had bad luck, and a bad wife, which is the worst sort of luck. She lost me my practice, and so I grew sick of medicine. I couldn't be bothered with the social side of it. Money was what I wanted: money and quiet. And so I took a dose of medicine: fifteen years at a shilling a

bottle, with advice thrown in, and then a quiet life. That was all I wanted. And I've very nearly got it. Another year or two will make me secure. Security . . . that's what I wanted. Well, here we are . .

So the morning's work began, and no morning, as far as Edwin could see, was different from any other. He was thankful when the clock struck ten, and Dr Harris ruthlessly locked his surgery door. Then, fortunately, he was obliged to take the next tram to the hospital; for if he had lingered, as he was sometimes forced to do on Sundays, Dr Harris would have lit his pipe and proceeded to regale him with anecdotes of medical experiences that always related to sex, on which he dwelt with a slow, deliberate satisfaction, like a dog that nuzzles a piece of garbage.

The aspects of medical science that related to sex were the only ones in which he was really interested. He possessed an expensive and eclectic library of books on these subjects, to which he was always adding others that he bought from the colporteurs of medical pornography who are continually pestering the members of his profession. These he would pore over at night, when Edwin was providentially engaged in reading for his final. 'Medicine is an extremely interesting profession from that point of view,' he would say, and indeed the dispenser soon discovered that this aspect of the medical profession supplied Dr Harris with a great number of his patients. In the squalid underways of the city he had established a reputation for skill and discretion in the treatment of contagious disease, and the unfortunate victims who came to Lower Sparkdale from more reputable suburbs were ready to pay through the nose for his advice.

One night, hearing behind his curtain the overtures of one of these cases that he knew so well, he suddenly became aware of a tone that was familiar in the patient's voice. Listening more closely he could have sworn it was the voice of Griffin. Evidently it was a person of some consequence, for Dr Harris devoted as much as five minutes to his examination.

'I suppose you wouldn't like a prescription?'

'No, you'd better make it up for me,' said the voice that resembled that of Griffin.

'Certainly . . . delighted.'

Dr Harris breathed heavily, as he always did when writing a prescription, and then passed the slip of paper behind the curtain to Edwin. Edwin, looking at once for the name at the head of the prescription, was disappointed. The patient had preferred to remain anonymous. He dispensed the medicine, and when Dr Harris had said good-bye to the patient he could not resist the temptation of looking from behind the curtain to verify his suspicions. He could only see the back of the departing patient, but the suspicion filled him with a queer sensation of awe.

It showed him a new aspect of medicine that had never occurred to him in hospital life, but would, no doubt, be present often enough in private practice. Griffin was a person well known to Edwin and his friends, a person about whose adventures and their consequences he would easily and naturally have spoken. If he had retailed the incident to Maskew and W.G. in the Dousita, it would have been the occasion of a little pity and probably some irreverent mirth. But he saw at once that he could do nothing of the sort. He had become, for the first time in his life, the keeper of

a professional secret. For the rest of the world, however interested, Griffin and Griffin's disease must not exist.

Edwin felt the weight of a new responsibility, reflecting that in his future life he would in all probability become possessed of many such secrets and that there might be occasions on which his sense of duty would be divided between the traditional discretion of Hippocrates and the instincts of humanity. He invented a hypothetical case for his own confusion. Supposing he had a sister to whom Griffin was engaged: supposing that they were going to be married in a week after this uncomfortable knowledge had come into his possession, endangering the whole of her future happiness and perhaps her life: what, in that case, should be his attitude towards the question of professional secrecy? What would he do? Would he be justified in telling her what he knew? Hippocrates said 'No'; but Hippocrates' refusal narrowed the field of possibilities to confronting Griffin with his own shame and threatening him with . . . what? Not with exposure—for that Hippocrates forbade. Obviously with death. And that would be murder. . . .

Balancing the relative heinousness of murder and perjury, Edwin began to laugh at himself, and while he did this a curious reminiscence came into his mind: the picture of a small boy, who resembled him in very little but had been himself, lying in the hedge side of Murderer's Cross Road, on the downs above St Luke's, reflecting on the same problem of the justification of homicide and saying to himself as he brooded on his wrongs: 'I can quite easily understand a chap wanting to murder a chap.' And this picture tempting him further, he relapsed

into a dream of those strange, remote days tinged with extremes of happiness and misery, and both of them unreal. . . .

He thought no more of Griffin.

CHAPTER IX

EASY ROW

I

For a whole year Edwin inhabited the room above the lock-up surgery in Lower Sparkdale. It was a happy year, for into it was crowded a great wealth of experience and elevating discovery to which the mechanical drudgery of Dr Harris's dispensing room acted as ballast. In his medical studies he began to feel for the first time the fruits of his earlier labours: to realise that all medicine was little more than an intelligent application to life of the theoretical subjects that he had mastered without reasoning. From the very first day of his experience in the dissecting room there was nothing in all that he had learnt that had not its direct bearing on his present practice; and the reflection that he possessed all this essential knowledge ready for use was exhilarating in itself. Again, the fact that he was now standing on his feet, actually earning his own living, gave him a greater happiness than he had ever known in his days of dependance; it made him accept the routine of Lower Sparkdale as a penance, cheering him with the thought that so much sacrifice was really necessary before he should be master of himself.

He was lonely; but this seemed inevitable, for no person in his senses could be expected to grind along in a steam-tram to Lower Sparkdale for the sake of his company; and the final year was too full of strenuous studies for all of them to allow

of much indulgence in the joys of friendship. Matthew Boyce made a few heroic attempts. He even spent several evenings in Harris's dispensary, finding the shilling doctor's clinical and commercial methods something of a joke. They were no joke to Edwin: he had recognised long ago that they were no more than Harris's solution of the problem of living. The doctor saw nothing unworthy in them. He did his best, within his limited knowledge, for his patients. He was kind, and even, on occasion, generous. If there were fault to be found it must be with the State that allowed such ignorant men to deal with precious human bodies, and not with him. When the first humour of the experience was exhausted Boyce came to the surgery no more. Little by little Edwin's insulation became more complete, and in the end he relapsed into the degree of loneliness that he had known in his early days at St Luke's.

Given the opportunity, he almost enjoyed it. There was something remote and secret about this little room in the corner house above the grinding trams, and when the surgery emptied at night and he went upstairs to work he would find himself suddenly overwhelmed with a feeling of thankfulness for the fact that it was so peculiarly his: that his own books and pictures and clothes had made it individual and different from any other room in the whole of the city. And when the town slept, and he sat on reading into the early hours of the morning, the lonely chamber was like a lighthouse set in seas of night, and dreams of the misty lands beyond Severn, of Mendip couched in darkness, or of the sleeping wolds by Overton, would beat at his lighted window like seabirds in the night.

At first the sacrifices that his poverty demanded had seemed no more than part of a new and exciting game. It was some months before he realised that, literally, he could not afford the indulgence of a single pleasure that cost money. If he were to free himself from the bondage of Dr Harris's dispensary it was absolutely necessary that he should save enough money to pay his examination fees. He began to find a new delight in carefully hoarded shillings, and this practice threw him into a curious sympathy with his employer. Each of them, on a different scale, was committed to a present sacrifice for the sake of future freedom; and this reflection reconciled him in some degree to the inconveniences that Dr Harris's miserly ways inflicted on him.

It was galling, none the less, to find that he could not afford to buy a single new book, to hire a piano, or to hear any music except the free recitals by which the municipal organist convinced the citizens of North Bromwich that they were getting something for their money, in debauches of sound that reminded them how much the organ had cost. Sometimes, to Edwin's joy, he played the fugues of the Well-tempered Clavier, and on their wide streams he would be carried from springs of mountain sweetness, by weir and cataract to solemn tidal waters and lose himself at last in seas of absolute music. Time after time he thanked God for Bach, and walked home to his garret like a man who has gazed upon the splendour of a full sea and carries its tumult in his mind far inland.

Through all these experiences Edwin was so possessed by the one idea of holding on until his final exam was over that he scarcely missed the society of his friends. He knew that his friendship with Boyce was founded too deeply in common

experience ever to be shaken by his own changed circumstances: it might lapse, but it could never be broken. He always felt that the future held more for them than the past had ever given; but his other friends, Maskew and Martin in particular, seemed to have been translated to another place of existence. In the wards and in the lecture theatres he would meet them; but elsewhere they had nothing in common with his way of existence.

Even W.G. seemed gradually to be slipping away from him—an unreasonable state, for Edwin, after all, was now for the first time sharing something of the big man's early experience. For several months they had scarcely spoken, and then, one day, nearly ran into each other's arms in Sackville Row, and almost mechanically wandered off to the Dousita together. In the shades of the smoking-room nothing had changed. When they sank into the cushions of their favourite corner Miss Wheeler approached them with an exact replica of the smile with which, four years before, she had engaged the heart of Maskew; and when she took their order, she stood on one leg in exactly the same position, leaning, with a hint of tiredness that was not surprising in a young woman who habitually breathed tobacco smoke in place of oxygen, with her hand on the curtain at the side of their settee.

'I never see Mr Maskew now,' she said with a sigh. 'I can't think whatever *'as* happened to all you boys, I'm sure.'

She brought them coffee, and W.G., who had scarcely spoken, but whose knitted brows testified to the pressure of some urgent problem, said:—

'Well, how do you like it?'

'What do you mean?'

'Being on your own.'

'Oh, it's all right,' said Edwin.

'I never thought you'd stick it,' W.G. confessed. 'I didn't think you had it in you. You see, in your case there was never the least necessity for it.'

'There was, you know——'

'I could have understood it if you'd had a regular bust-up. I should certainly have stayed at home if the governor hadn't booted me out. You never had anything of that kind.'

'No . . . not exactly. But the position was the same. I had a sort of . . . of emotional cold-douche. I was awfully sensitive about my mother. My father and I were all wrong. We'd really nothing in common. And it's turned out all right. That's the main thing.'

'You're a quixotic ass, my son. No . . . that's not the word, but it's the same sort of thing. It was really damned foolish of you.'

'It's jolly sound to stand on your own feet. You know where you are for the first time. It was only uncomfortable because he was really awfully decent. He is now: but he hasn't the faintest glimmering of my point of view.'

'They rarely have,' said W.G. gloomily. 'Still, you haven't made such an ass of yourself as I have.'

'Something new?'

'Yes . . . I'm married.'

'Good God!'

'It isn't as bad as that,' W.G. chuckled. 'I thought it would come as a bit of a shock to you.'

'But why on earth——?'

'Well, you see she was awfully unhappy at home. Brute of a father. And we simply got tired of waiting. That's all. You must come and see us.

She always remembered your clerking in her ward. We're living in furnished rooms in Alvaston. It's an amazing experience, you know, marriage. Quite different from anything else of the kind.' In view of W.G.'s experience in these matters Edwin was ready to take this for granted.

'I should think it is a damned funny thing,' he said.

They parted. There was something almost pathetic to Edwin in W.G.'s hot handclasp. He felt that W.G. was up against something far bigger than anything that had happened to him before: a strange, momentous adventure, yet one that was thrilling and, in a way, enviable. Once again he found himself admiring the big man's desperate daring. W.G. with a wife, and probably, in a few years, children! . . . Assuredly they were all growing old.

II

In all that summer Edwin scarcely saw a patch of living green except the leprous plane-trees that sickened in the hospital square. The current of his life flowed slowly through the culverts of grimy brick that led from Lower Sparkdale to the Infirmary. He became part of the stream of dusty humanity that set citywards and back again with the regularity of a tide. In December he came to the end of his penance. The final examination was fixed for the beginning of January, and before he could sit for it, he was compelled to take a course of practical midwifery, twenty cases in all, which compelled his residence for a couple of weeks in the neighbourhood of the Prince's Hospital, the institution to which this department was attached.

Matthew Boyce and he had decided a year before that they would do this work together, and though the unusual strain of the fortnight in Easy Row would be a doubtful preliminary to the effort of the final examination, the two friends had always looked forward to the experience.

The authorities of the Prince's Hospital, lacking obstetrical wards, had made this course the opportunity for establishing an Out-patient Department that could deal with ten cases a week at the nominal charge of five shillings each. The students worked in pairs, and though they could never be sure of attending their cases together, the resident staff of the hospital, and, if necessary, a consultant physician, were always available in case of an emergency. Edwin and Boyce were housed in one of the faded Georgian buildings that faced the hospital. Its lower stories, like those of all its neighbours, were devoted to theatrical lodgings; but a special night-bell, polished by the moist hands of forty anxious husbands every month, communicated with the upper room in which the resident students attempted to sleep. The house was as well known to all the poorer people in the neighbouring warrens as were the faces pale with sleeplessness of the students who issued from it, carrying the black bags that were symbolical of their labours, a source of mysterious speculation to the children of the district, and of amusement to the 'professionals' who inhabited the front rooms.

On a Monday morning in December the landlady received Edwin and Boyce and installed them in a small room at the back of the ground-floor infested with portraits of smiling young ladies in tights, inscribed, with the most dashing signatures imaginable, to herself. Mrs Meadows was evidently very

proud of these decorations and called attention to the most blatant pair of legs by polishing the glass of their frame with her apron.

'I hope you gentlemen will be comfortable,' she said. 'Not that I doubt it. I don't have many complaints.' The statement was a challenge, and implied that if there should be any complaints the lodgers might look to themselves.

'It's a nice fresh room,' she said, throwing open a French window that disclosed a small patch of black earth that had once been covered with grass but was now untenanted by any living organisms but cats and groundsel.

'I like them to keep the window open. It takes away the smell of the gentlemen's disinfectant. Not but what it's clean, I dare say.'

Edwin and Boyce would have assented in any case if it were only to release the composite lodging-house smell that penetrated the room from the adjoining 'domestic offices,' and Mrs Meadow's kitchen where, it would be imagined, turnip-tops simmered day and night upon a gas-ring.

'Then there's a pianoforte,' she said, hesitating at the dusty *portière*. 'I find that professionals like a pianoforte. It's cheery like.'

In a little while it became apparent that the professionals liked a pianoforte, in every one of the thirty odd houses within earshot, even if they could not play one. From the hour of midday, when they rose, until six o'clock, when they betook themselves to their various theatres, the pianos of Easy Row were never silent.

'It's no good trying to do any work in this place,' said Edwin.

'There won't be any time, anyway,' said Boyce. 'You wait till the fun begins.'

They lunched together on steak-and-kidney pudding and turnip-tops with a brand of bottled beer in which Mrs Meadows showed an admirable taste, and in the early afternoon the fun began.

From the beginning, Fate had decreed a complication by deciding that Mrs Hadley, back of number four, court sixteen, Granby Street, and Mrs Higgins over number fifty-four Rea Barn Lane, should conspire to increase the population of North Bromwich at the same moment. Mr Hadley and Mr Higgins achieved a dead heat, arriving on the doorstep together in a dripping perspiration with messages of an equal urgency.

'This is rather rotten,' said Boyce. 'Which of these ladies will you take?'

'I'll have Mrs Higgins,' said Edwin. 'I suppose the bag's all right?'

The bag was right enough, though it contained very little that could do any harm, and smelt abominably of Lysol. Mr Higgins, still out of breath, with beads of sweat sweeping an alluvium of metal dust into the furrows of his cheeks, carried the bag for Edwin. For all his exhaustion, Mr Higgins wanted to run, and Edwin, walking with long strides beside him, was in danger of losing his dignity by being swept into the same degree of panic. The reflection that this would betray his inexperience held him back.

'The nurse said very urgent, doctor,' Mr Higgins panted.

'Yes . . . yes. You mustn't excite yourself. It'll be all right.'

'I suppose,' said Mr Higgins doubtfully, 'you're well up in these sort of cases, doctor? I expect you've seen a lot of them?'

Edwin wished he had been able to grow a moustache for the occasion.

'Hundreds,' he said.

Mr Higgins gave a sigh of relief. 'That's a good thing. That's a very good thing. You see, I'm nairvous, doctor. I lost my fairst over it, and I don't want to lose this one. Very young she is.'

'Is this her first?'

'Yes, doctor.'

Another bit of bad luck!

Through a maze of gritty streets they hurried, reaching, at last, a house beside a corner 'public' which a cluster of women, gossiping in their aprons on the doorstep, proclaimed as the site of this momentous birth. One of them snatched the black bag from Mr Higgins. 'You get away, 'Iggins, and 'ave a pint of beer quiet like. This baint no place for an 'usband. This way, doctor. Here she is, poor lamb.'

She pushed her way up the stairs, breathing heavily. Her bunchy skirts filled the staircase, which was no wider than a loft-ladder and very dark.

''Ere 'e is,' she cried triumphantly, as she pushed open a matchboard door. ''Ere 'e is 'Ere's the doctor. Now you won't be long, my lover. 'E'll 'elp you. You'll 'elp 'er, won't you, doctor?'

She deposited the talismanic bag triumphantly on the foot of the bed; then she winked at Edwin: 'I'll go and keep 'Iggins out of the way,' she said.

'I'm that glad you've come, doctor,' said the nurse. She was a little shrivelled woman, with a nervous smile and her hair packed into a black net with a wide mesh that made her whole head sombre and forbidding. Her lips twitched when she smiled, and Edwin, who had been counting on

the moral support of her experience, saw at once that she was even more anxious than himself. He was soon to know that the women who acted as professional midwives in the North Bromwich slums were usually widows left without means, who adopted this profession with no other qualification than a certain wealth of subjective experience, on which they were careful to insist. The claim: 'I've had eight of them myself, so *I* ought to know,' did not atone for the fact that they didn't actually know anything at all. Mrs Brown, the lady to whose mercies the trustful Mr Higgins had committed his second, was a timid specimen of the class. Beneath her protestations of experience her soul quaked with terror, and a hazy conviction that if anything went wrong, she, the unregistered, would probably be committed for manslaughter, reduced her to a state of dazed incompetence in which she heard without hearing Edwin's none too confident directions. She went downstairs tremulously to bring hot water, and Edwin was left alone with his patient.

'It won't be long, doctor, will it?' she said.

'Of course not . . . of course not,' said Edwin. He felt very much of a fraud, for he hadn't the least idea how long it would be. The whole picture was moving: the patient, a girl of twenty-four or five, her honey-coloured hair drawn back tightly from a face that was blotched already with tears, but not ill-looking: the humility of the little bedroom with its hired furniture and certain humble attempts at ornamentation: pink ribbon bows upon the curtains, a ridiculous china ornament on the mantelpiece, and brass knobs at the foot of the bedstead, so polished that they had already become loose. No doubt Mrs Higgins the second

had been in respectable suburban service, and these worthy efforts were the signs of an attempt to introduce into Rea Barn Lane the amenities of Alvaston. She lay quietly on the bed, gazing at nothing while Edwin unpacked his bag. He did not look at her, but became suddenly conscious that her body had given a kind of jump and that her hands were desperately clutching a towel that Mrs Brown had knotted to the rail at the bottom of the bed. Then he heard the joints of the bedstead creak. 'It's all right. Cheer up. . . . It won't be long,' he said.

Mrs Brown emerged panting from the stairway with hot water. 'That's right, my lover, that's right. . . . That's another one less. Now, let the doctor have a look at you.'

A strange business. . . . It was a moment that might have been difficult; but Edwin soon realised that the seriousness of the occasion, the fact that this young creature's life was veritably in his hands, made modesty seem a thing of no account. In the eyes of this woman Edwin was not a young man but an agency of relief from pain. In the body that pain dominated there could be no room for blushes. Edwin, trying to summon all his hardly learned theory to his aid in practice, was suddenly impressed with the obligations that this confidence imposed on him. He remembered the terms of the Hippocratic oath. Yea . . . a goodly heritage!

'Is it all right, doctor?' said the anxious voice of Mrs Brown.

'Yes, it's all right.'

'Thank the Lord for that! You hear what the doctor says, my lover——'

'But it will be a long time yet.'

'Oh, don't say that, doctor, don't say that,'

Mrs Higgins wailed. 'You aren't going to leave me?'

'It's no good staying here now,' he said, as gently as he could. 'It's really all right. It's only a matter of time.'

'Can't you help her a bit, doctor?'

Of course he couldn't. A business of that kind would mean calling in the house surgeon from the Prince's. He was determined not to be driven into a panic, though this would have been easy enough, when he was convinced that the case was taking a normal though inevitably lengthy course.

'I expect you'll want me again some time this evening,' he said.

Mrs Brown showed him downstairs. 'You're *sure* it is all right, aren't you, doctor?' she said.

'Perfectly all right. You know what a first case is.'

'I'd ought to,' said Mrs Brown proudly. 'I've had eight myself.'

He trudged back to Easy Row, where the professionals' pianos, tuned in quarter-tones, were already combining to show their catholicity in musical taste. Boyce was drowsing in an easy-chair with the Greek Anthology open in his lap.

'Well, how's your Mrs Higgins?' he asked lazily.

'Oh, she's all right. A *primip*. Is Mrs Hadley through her little troubles?'

'B.B.A. Born before arrival. A soft job. Saves a lot of trouble.'

'My good lady will haul us out in the middle of the night, damn her!' said Edwin. A conventional mode of expression, for he didn't in the least feel like damning Mrs Higgins. In his mind he still carried the picture of her plain hair and blotched

face: he could hear the sound of that sudden shudder and the noise of the bedstead creaking.

The evening passed quietly. They tried to read, but found the feeling of suspense made that impossible. No message came from Mrs Higgins, and as they were almost certain to be called out in the night, they went to bed early. While they were undressing, Boyce humming softly the Liebestod from Tristan, the bell in their bedroom rang.

'Mrs Higgins,' said Edwin. 'I'd better go and see.'

He groped his way downstairs. In the front room a party of music-hall artistes were making a noisy supper. Before he could reach the door the bell rang again, and when he opened it, a big man whose breath smelt of liquor, lurched into the hall.

'Are you the doctor?'

'Yes.'

'You're to come at once to thirty-four Greville Street. It's the missus. The nurse says it's urgent.'

The nurse always said it was urgent. Boyce came downstairs grumbling.

'We'd better go together.'

'What about my friend, Mrs Higgins?'

'Oh, damn Mrs Higgins!' said Boyce.

It was a clear and frosty night, in which all points of light, whether of starshine, or street-lamps, or of blue sparks crackling from the tramway cables, shone brightly. The Greville Street husband lurched along beside them, just sufficiently awake to show them the way through a maze of rectangular byways to a street that lay upon the outer edge of the district that the hospital covered. The chill clarity of the air dispelled sleep. It was even pleasant to be walking there, for at this time

of night the town was so empty that they might almost have been walking over a country road.

'Here it is,' said the husband thickly.

Boyce and Edwin entered together. The front room of the house was crowded with people who should have been in bed. They sat clustered about a table on which stood a number of bottles from one of which the messenger had evidently extracted his peculiar perfume. In the corner chair, next to the window, an old woman in a lace cap had fallen asleep. Opposite her a very dirty old man toasted his shins in front of the fire. A strapping girl with dark, untidy hair, and an almost aggressive physical beauty was holding forth shrilly to a group of three women who had wandered in to drink and gossip from a neighbouring court.

'Here they are,' said the husband sullenly, 'two on 'em.'

'My God! . . . Two of them? Is that all?' said the dark girl, examining and, as it seemed, approving.

Upstairs they found a midwife of another but equally characteristic type: a fat woman whose attention was divided between the patient in bed and the cheerful company in the front room. On the surface she was a little patronising, an attitude that the two students' inexperience made it difficult for them to resent. 'I know what you doctors want,' she said, standing with her sleeves rolled up over her red forearms. 'Plenty of hot water, that's what you want. I've got some disinfectant too. I've often been with the 'ospital doctors. *Now* we shan't be long.'

She bustled downstairs, looking into the front room for a drink on her way to the kitchen. Boyce, confident in the completion of his first case, took

the lead in questioning the patient, a slightly older version of the dark sanguine girl they had seen below. Her whole attitude towards the business, though less pathetic than that of the unforgotten Mrs Higgins, was equally moving. It implied such a cheerful and courageous acceptance of life and this most uncomfortable of its experiences. Her amazing vitality pervaded the room. It could be seen in her masterful smile, in the grip of her red fingers on the knotted towel, in the deep suffusion of her face. A jolly woman, built in the mould of a fighter, who would neither take quarter nor give it. When Boyce had examined her she smiled, disclosing a fine set of teeth, and solemnly winked.

'Well, doctor, what about it?'

'Listen to 'er,' said the midwife, chuckling. 'That's the way to take it!'

'Well, it's all right, you know, but it won't be just yet awhile.'

'My God . . . I didn't pay the 'ospital five bob for you to tell me that. Look 'ere, doctor, my elder sister 'ad a horrible time with her first. 'Ad to 'ave it took off 'er. Be a sport, doctor, and give us a smell of chloriform. Come on, now! There's two on you. . . . 'Ard-'earted devils all you doctors are. Baint they, Mrs Perkins?' She smiled at the midwife, and then, suddenly, her face changed and she clutched at the knotted towel. 'Oh, my!' she said, and Edwin saw the veins in her neck swell, and heard her clench her teeth.

'That's the way, dearie. That's the way,' said Mrs Perkins, gritting her own teeth in sympathy and smoothing back the hair from the patient's brow.

Edwin and Boyce were debating as to whether

it were worth while staying when a messenger from the hospital arrived from below to say that Mrs Hadley, Boyce's patient of the afternoon, was 'took worse,' and so Edwin was left alone once more in the squalor of the patient's room. He sat waiting in a chair that was supposed to be easy, listening to the conversation of the woman and her nurse. Most of it was family history of a scandalous kind, and the manner of its expression was extremely frank. In the course of his hospital work he had never before realised the extraordinary contradictions of the code by which the talk of the working-class is governed. In its mixture of delicacies and blatancies it amazed him. Both the women were fluent gossips, and the conversation never ceased, except in those moments of acute and sudden tension when the patient's hands clutched at her towel and the midwife mopped her brow. Then, when the upstairs room was silent, a murmur of laughter and loud voices would come up the stairs from below. In this family, at anyrate, the occasion of a birth did not lack celebration. Even the patient was curious about what was happening downstairs. 'What's our Susan doing?' she said from time to time.

An interminable business. As the night wore on it grew very chilly, and Edwin shivered in his chair. The case hung fire unaccountably, and in this, the first of many such cold vigils, he fell into a strange mood, often to be repeated, in which the sublime influences of night and solitude combined to purge his reflections of pettiness and showed him what an unimaginable mystery his own life was. The patient fell into an uneasy doze. The midwife nodded in her chair, snatching up her head with a conscious jerk whenever it

lolled over her fat bosom. The smelly oil-lamp on the mantelpiece gave an occasional sputter when a drop of water was sucked up into the wick. In the room below the excited talk had petered out and only a sound of soft snoring was heard, like the breathing of cows in a byre.

Edwin thought of many things. It seemed to him that his mind burned clear as frosty starlight lighting forgotten memories of his childhood. He thought of his own mother. He wondered if she had lain like the woman on the bed on the night when he was born. He wondered if it had been in the least like this, and whether another doctor, whose name he did not even know, had sat by the fireplace in the little room at Halesby waiting and seeing his own life stretched out before him in this light of perilous clarity. He thought of St Luke's—of a thousand small things that had lain submerged for years and now appeared unbidden. The strangeness of his own experience, the elements of linked circumstance that had combined to twist his life into its present state and make him what he was. He thought of his father, with an unusual degree of charity, realising that this man too was no more than a slave of the same blind influences driven hither and thither in spite of his innate goodwill. Edwin was ashamed to think that he had been angry with him. In his present mood it seemed to him an unreasonable thing that one should be angry with any human creature. Pity . . . yes, and love—but never anger. So, like a devotee in a Tibetan lamassary, he saw his fellow creatures, his father, himself, the midwife, and the woman on the bed, bound helpless to the revolving wheel which is the earth. And the earth seemed very small beneath the stars. . . .

At two o'clock in the morning the handsome girl from downstairs, who was the patient's sister, came softly into the room and asked the midwife if she would like a cup of tea. The patient blinked at her with red eyes.

'How is it going, Sally?' said the sister.

'Oh, it's all right. I suppose it's got to be worse before it's better,' she said, with a laugh. 'Ask the doctor if he'll have some tea too.'

Edwin accepted gratefully. It was harsh stuff that had been standing on the hob downstairs for some hours already. Mrs Perkins was easily persuaded into doctoring hers with a tablespoonful of brandy from the bottle that is a regular constituent of the working class *layette*. The sister sat at the foot of the bed and stared lazily at Edwin.

'You look tired, doctor,' she said.

Edwin admitted that he had had a biggish day.

'You ought to get a bit of sleep,' said the dark girl. 'Sorry there bain't no spare beds in the house; but you can turn in with me if you like.'

She looked so daringly provocative that Edwin had a horrible suspicion that she meant it; but it was evidently the sort of joke that Greville Street understood, for the patient on the bed cried, 'Ethel, you *are* a cough-drop, you'll make the doctor blush,' and Mrs Perkins rocked with laughter until she spilt her tea.

'Well, why should you have all the fun, Sally? It isn't every day we get a nice young man in the house.'

'*Fun* . . .,' said the patient wryly. 'You'll know all about this sort of fun some day.'

'Not just yet, thank you,' said Ethel. 'I can look after myself better than that.'

She went downstairs again. Edwin was beginning

to feel a little unhappy about the case. To his inexperience the long delay seemed abnormal, and his imagination presented to him a series of text-book disasters. While he stood doubting whether he should give himself away by sending to the hospital for the house-surgeon, he was startled by a sudden cry. Now, at anyrate, there was no doubt about it. At this rate, he thought, it could not be long. But it took three hours: three hours of desperate struggle in which he could give no help, though the thing was so fierce that he found his sympathies snatched up into it: so that he held his breath and clenched his hands and felt his own temples bursting with effort. There had been no experience like it. As he sat at the bedside with the patient's fingers clasped about his wrist, he had the feeling that this woman, who had joked with him half an hour before with the dry, courageous cynicism that colours the philosophy of her class, was not an individual human soul any longer; not a woman at all, but a mass of straining, tortured muscle animated by the first force of life. So it had been since the first woman cried out in the night under the tangles of Caucasus: so it would always be: the most sublime and terrible of all physical experiences, a state of sheer physical possession, more powerful than any spiritual ecstasy imaginable.

At five o'clock the baby was born—a boy, and Mrs Perkins, standing by with a skein of twisted thread in her hand, danced with nervousness. Edwin's hands also trembled; but his heart was lightened with a sudden relief, as though the labour had been his and his also the accomplishment. A palpably ridiculous state of mind . . . but it took him like that.

The dark girl put her head in at the door. She was very pale now. Had the whole household shared in these physical throes?

'Is it all right?' she said.

'Yes . . . it's a boy. A beautiful boy.'

'Hallo, Eth,' said a quiet voice from the bed. 'Go and tell Jim.'

It was the first word the patient had spoken.

A moment later she opened her eyes and stared in a dazed way at Edwin. She smiled. She was a woman again—an extraordinarily chastened woman—and somehow strangely beautiful. 'Thank you, doctor,' she said. 'You 'elped me ever so. Did I be'ave very bad, Mrs Perkins?'

'Bad? You be'aved fine,' said Mrs Perkins, wrapping the baby in a blanket and putting it in the fender.

The patient gave a deep sigh and seemed to relapse into her thoughts. From time to time she would say a couple of words in a weak-contented voice.

''As Eth told Jim?' she asked several times, and then: 'What'll mother think?'

'You be quiet, my lover,' said the midwife. 'Don't you disturb yourself with talking.'

At last she said suddenly: 'I'm better now,' and asked if she might see the baby. Mrs Perkins unwrapped the blanket from a red and frowning forehead and showed it to her. She touched its cheek with her finger and smiled miraculously. The action seemed to bring her submerged personality to the surface again.

'Ugly little b——,' she said, with a happy laugh. 'Looks as if 'e'd been on the booze.'

'I shan't forget the way you 'elped me, doctor,' she said again, when Edwin left the house. Although

it was still dark, the workmen's trams had begun to run, and lights appeared in the lower windows of public houses where hot soup was on sale. When he entered the bedroom of their lodging, Edwin found, and envied, Boyce sleeping stertorously with the blankets pulled over his head and an overcoat on his feet. Three hours later, when the landlady came to call them, he woke, and explained to Edwin the excitements of his own night: how, in the middle of it, Edwin's own Mrs Higgins had called him out ('decent little woman,' said Boyce), and how, from sixteen Granby Street, he had been called to a case at the other end of the district in a common lodging-house kept by a Pole.

'No hot water . . . no soap . . . nothing but a bucket that they'd used for scrubbing the floors. Not even a bed! Just a straw mattress with a couple of gray blankets on it. Two other children and a man in the room. And crawling! I've stripped and had a rub down with a towel, but I feel as if they were all over me now. You couldn't see them on the grey blankets, you know.'

'Sounds dismal. Had they a capable woman? My Mrs Perkins wasn't up to much.'

'Midwife? My dear chap, they didn't run to luxuries like that. It is a bit thick, isn't it? when a modern surgeon-accoucheur is reduced to washing the baby with his own soap. As a matter of fact, it was an extraordinarily interesting performance. The thing felt as if it would break. But seriously, you know, this sort of thing teaches you a bit about twentieth century housing.'

'Yes, it's pretty bad,' said Edwin. 'There's one thing about it: working all night like this gives you a terrific appetite.'

III

For a few days the extreme novelty of their adventure sustained them, but after five nights of broken or obliterated sleep, the presence of the night-bell at their bedside stood for a symbol of perpetual unrest. Their days were spent in visiting patients whom they had attended. All examination work was made impossible by the fatigue that follows want of sleep, and the fact that they were committed to a kind of enforced idleness made their sojourn in Easy Row almost as much a holiday as the great summer days at Overton.

Both of them found that they could not even read for pleasure; and so the undisturbed hours of the day were passed in talk and in music. Mrs Meadows's piano had suffered under the fingers and thumbs of countless guests; but Edwin and Boyce shared the cost of a tuner and worked together through the Wagner scores and the subtler treasures that lay hidden in the songs of Hugo Wolf. They had few visitors, for this community of taste had already begun to isolate them from their student friends; but Boyce's father, the poet, often came to have tea with them and to share their music, a man as versatile and sanguine as Meredith's Roy Richmond, and yet so versed in every variety of knowledge and so reverent of beauty that Edwin felt there was no such company in the world: one who took all beauty and knowledge for his province.

One afternoon a message came to the house in Easy Row from the hospital, and as Mrs Meadows was engaged in some obscure adjustment of her toilet, Edwin went to the door to receive it. He took the message, and was returning when another

figure appeared on the path. It was that of a young girl of his own age, or, perhaps, a little older, and she hurried forward when she saw that he was closing the door. He waited.

'You weren't going to shut me out, were you?' she said. She smiled, and Edwin saw that her eyes were of a warm hazel such as sunshine reveals in peaty river water. Before them Edwin found himself blushing.

'No, indeed,' he said. 'Do you want Mrs Meadows? I'll go and tell her.'

'Mrs Meadows? This *is* thirty-seven, isn't it?'

'Yes . . . thirty-seven.'

'I've come to see my friend, Miss Latham. She's lodging here.'

'I'm so sorry. Of course. I expect she's in the front room.'

'Thank you.' She spoke very demurely. He stood aside to let her pass and with her a faint fragrance of white rose.

By this time Miss Latham herself had emerged, a blowsy woman who was taking a small part in the Christmas pantomime at the theatre, and had introduced herself to the friends through Mrs Meadows a few days before.

'Why, Rosie, my dear, isn't this just sweet of you? Fancy finding you on the step flirting with Doctor. . . . Doctor Ingleby! That's right, isn't it?

'Oh, what a shame, Hetty! We weren't, were we?' Ingenuously she turned her eyes on Edwin again. Were they hazel? Perhaps they were almost amber. A matter of light . . .

'No . . . I'm afraid we weren't. She didn't give us time.'

'Two doctors in the house! Think of that!'

said Miss Hetty Latham, whose conversation habitually ran from one note of exclamation to another. 'Imagine how safe we feel, Rosie!'

And Rosie surveyed Edwin seriously.

'Aren't you awfully young?'

'I suppose I am rather. I'm not qualified yet. But I expect to be next week.'

'Then you must be awfully clever too——'

'What on earth are we all doing talking here in the passage? Come along in and have a cup of tea,' said Miss Latham boisterously.

'As you two are such great friends already, I suppose it's waste of time introducing you.'

'Really——' Edwin protested.

'Very well, then. Dr Ingleby: Miss Rosie Beaucaire. I never get the order right. You can take it or leave it. May he come to tea with us, Rosie?'

'Of course he may.'

'Come along then, both of you . . .'

CHAPTER X

WHITE ROSES

I

It was the first of many amazing adventures, to which Matthew Boyce supplied a calculated and cynical commentary, watching Edwin as though he were the subject of a physiological experiment —as indeed he was. But lack of sympathy in one quarter was scarcely likely to worry Edwin when he had found it so overwhelmingly in another. In a few days Miss Latham, the most tactful of duennas, had withdrawn from the scene. On the first night of their acquaintance Edwin had taken the hazel-eyed Miss Beaucaire back to her lodgings in Prince Albert's Place at the back of the theatre, where the pantomime was in rehearsal. All the way through the squalid, lamp-lit streets they had talked of things that were entrancing, simply because they had to do with her. Edwin thought that no companionship in all his life had been so natural and so easy; and this was not surprising, for the young woman, in addition to physical charms that were armoury enough in themselves, had developed the faculty commonly acquired by ladies of her profession, of devoting herself entirely to the companion of the moment and giving the impression that she had never known, and would never want to know, any other person in the world. Rosie was only twenty-four, but had given at least the last third of her life to studying male of the species of which Edwin was a peculiarly ingenuous

example. At the door of her lodgings she had conjured an atmosphere of mysterious intimacy. Speaking in a voice that was low and of a thrilling tenderness, she had said :—

'I mustn't ask you to come in to-day. It's a dreadful shame; but mother has one of her headaches, and the noise might disturb her. You understand, don't you?'

Edwin, with a vision of an elderly and delicate version of Rosie herself lying on a sofa with a handkerchief dipped in eau-de-cologne over her eyes, assented. He thought it a very beautiful consideration on Rosie's part. A small black and tan terrier came dancing into the hall with a friendly yelp.

'Be quiet, Imp . . . oh, *do* be quiet! Isn't he a duck?' she said. 'Now, I must really go.' She held out her hand. A moment before she had taken off her glove, and Edwin, who had scarcely ever touched the hand of a woman before, thought that her fingers were the softest and most delicate things on earth.

'You'll come and have tea with us, won't you? I should like you to meet mother.'

'Of course, I'd like to. When?'

'Oh . . . quite soon. Any day this week. Promise me you won't forget . . .' As if he could ever forget! Her exquisite humility quite bowled him over. When she had closed the door behind her he walked away dazed with an unfamiliar emotion that made the mean street, with its uniform row of mid-Victorian houses on one side, and on the other the blank wall of the theatre and huge, sooty warehouses, seem a holy place. The Halesby Road, with its streaming traffic, shared the same transfiguration. The speed and strength of the horses enthralled him; the faces of men and women

walking homeward from their work in the city seemed triumphantly happy; the smooth wood-pavement, polished by the rolling of innumerable wheels, shone like a street in heaven. It seemed to Edwin as if the whole world had somehow been uplifted by a secret knowledge of his own experience. A night of wonder. . . .

'Well, what is the young woman's name?' asked Boyce, when he returned to Easy Row.

'Beaucaire. She's principal girl in the pantomime at the Queen's.'

'H'm. . . . Attractive little piece. But she can't be up to much if she's a pal of the Latham woman's. I've seen her there several times.'

'Oh, that means nothing,' Edwin explained. 'I don't think she's at all keen on her. They acted together somewhere years ago. You can't drop people when they've been kind to you. I don't think she's at all keen on her. She's quite all right. Lives with her mother in Prince Albert's Place.'

'Pretty rotten sort of street. Got a bad name, you know. I believe, as a matter of fact, it's considered rather the thing to lug an official mother about with you.'

'You don't mean——' Edwin began, going very white.

'Of course I don't. I don't know anything about her. Only, for God's sake, take care of yourself. A young woman of that kind generally has a fair share of experience. and you . . . well, you *haven't* exactly. Besides, it's just as well to remember that the final's coming off in ten days.'

The less said about the final the better.

'She isn't a chorus girl, you know. If you'd met her I think you'd admit that she's a lady. She told me that her mother——'

Boyce chuckled.

'As a matter of fact,' said Edwin, clinching the argument, 'her father was a country parson in low circumstances.'

'I understand they usually are,' said Boyce with a yawn.

Their night was complicated by two new cases. Next morning they appeared at breakfast with slightly ruffled tempers. They sat at opposite ends of the table, Edwin reading, without understanding, one of Oldham's caustic critiques on a symphony concert the night before, his friend glued to his beloved anthology.

'What did you say her name was?' said Boyce, apropos of nothing. 'Rosie, wasn't it?'

Edwin grunted.

'Have you ever sampled the *Sortes Virgilianae*? I sometimes try that trick with the anthology. There are plenty of generalisations, so it often comes off rather well. How's this for last night?'

'H'm——'

'Are you listening?'

'Yes, fire away.'

Boyce quoted :—

> Ἦ τὰ ῥόδα, ῥοδόεσσαν ἔχεις χαρίν, ἀλλὰ τί πωλεῖς
> σαυτήν, ἦ τὰ ῥόδα, ἠὲ συναμφοτερα;

'Rather neat, isn't it? While I was hanging about that case in Craven Street, I made a translation for you. Tell me what you think of it.

> 'You of the roses, rosy-fair,
> Sweet maiden, tell me whether
> You or the roses are your ware,
> Or both of them together.'

'Damned rotten, anyway,' said Edwin. 'Maiden's the wrong word . . .'

It comforted him, none the less, to find that Rosie did not revisit Miss Latham, though this lady pointedly rallied him on the doorstep, suggesting that his intimacy with Miss Beaucaire had reached a stage to which he had not yet attained but aspired devoutly. The work at Easy Row, that had slackened for a few days, came on with a rush; and though the image of this delicate creature now filled his nightly vigils, being even more precious for the squalid surroundings in which it came to him, he found it impossible to visit the lodgings in Prince Albert's Place, to which his thoughts with tantalising regularity returned.

The flood of work held until their fortnight was out, leaving them both washed-out and irritable. To speak frankly, the last few days of their comradeship had not been a success. Although Edwin made it clear that he didn't wish to discuss the affair of Rosie with Boyce, the incident of the Greek epigram rankled. He found it impossible to take the matter lightly, feeling that it was necessary to convince himself at all costs that he wasn't making a fool of himself, and finding it difficult to do so.

On the Monday next before the final examination he found himself a free man. It was a questionable liberty, for its enjoyment really depended on the result of this ordeal. He had definitely severed his connection with Dr Harris, intending to devote all his spare time at Easy Row and the week after to preparations for the exam. A big gamble. . . . Ten pounds and a few shillings was all he possessed in the world, except a problematical degree in medicine which, in another seven days, might make

him certain of four guineas a week as long as he chose to work. The margin seemed so small and the chance so desperate that he burned the last of his boats, selling his microscope to a pawnbroker for twelve pounds. Twenty-three pounds. . . One could do a lot with twenty-three pounds . . supposing nothing went wrong.

He found a cheap bed-sitting-room in a quiet street at the back of the University buildings. Here, and in the museums, he would be able to put in a week of intensive cramming. He found that he couldn't do it. He had reckoned without the unreasonable quantity of Rosie. The first night on which he settled down to read in his new lodging the thought of her would not let him rest. It was ridiculous. What he wanted was a hard walk. He would go up to Alvaston and rout Boyce out of his study for a tramp in the moonlight towards Southfield Beeches. He would apologise to Boyce for his bearishness during the last few days. Hadn't they assured each other on one of their ambrosial evenings at Overton more than a year ago, that the friendship of two men was a more precious and lasting experience than anything that the love of a woman could give? The whole thing was just the result of physical staleness: a symptom of the monotonous fatigue of the last year. He was going to get rid of it at all costs. He turned out the gas and went downstairs.

It was a discouraging night. A soft winter drizzle had set in from the West, and in the jaded Halesby Road nebulous street lamps were reflected in a layer of black slime that covered the wood-pavement. The shop windows were misted with rain, and the few people who had ventured out into the street trod carefully as though they were

afraid of slipping. A brutal night if ever there was one. Plodding up the street with the rain in his face he found that he was passing the end of Prince Albert's Place. He passed it by twenty paces, and then, almost against his will, turned round again. It was no good. There she was, for certain, within forty yards of him. If he were to walk along the road on the opposite side under the blank walls of the warehouses, he would be able to see the very room that held her exquisiteness. He did so. There was a light in the front room of the lower story, but the blinds were down, and he could not see any one inside. He crossed the road boldly and stood for a moment on the doorstep. It gave him a peculiar stab of happiness to feel so near her. He railed against the combination of shyness and convention that held him; for if he were to do the thing that was reasonable and downright, he would have walked straight into the house and told her the thousand things that choked his heart—he would have kissed her soft hands and gazed into her shy, adorable eyes. Yes, he would have kissed her eyes too. No doubt it would rather have taken the mother's breath away. Probably Rosie had never given him another thought since he left her on the doorstep. That was the funny part of it. He laughed at himself, and the sound of his laugh must somehow have penetrated the hall, for the black and tan terrier barked shrilly. 'Really, I'm off my head, you know,' he said to himself, and wandered off again into the wet streets, walking, until the small hours, those unimaginable slums in which his labours of the last fortnight had lain. 'God . . . it's ridiculous!' he thought, 'but a man can't help falling in love.' It seemed to him that the

phantom of Dorothy Powys regarded him seriously.

II

Next afternoon he presented himself at Prince Albert's Place. A landlady who might well have been Mrs Meadows' sister took in his card, and after a little buzz of conversation that might have been explained in a dozen sinister ways, he was admitted to the little room, whose lighted windows he had surveyed the night before. Rosie came forward to meet him. Once again, trembling, he took her hand. He even fancied —divine flattery! —that she blushed.

'This is my friend Dr Ingleby, mother,' she said.

'Very pleased to meet you, I'm sure,' said Mrs Beaucaire. 'Won't you come and sit over here?'

In the shadow of Mrs Beaucaire Edwin took his seat. She was a large woman with a husky voice and a big, dissipated face that had once been handsome. If she had any place in the scheme of things it was surely as a foil to the fragile grace of her daughter. Rosie, with an occasional sideways glance, was busy talking to a little man with a blue shaven chin and an immense mobile mouth, who looked like a bookie.

'I suppose you know Mr Flood?' said Mrs Beaucaire.

Edwin confessed that he did not.

'*The* Mr Flood, you know. Bertie, this is Mr Ingleby. . . . I beg your pardon, *Dr* Ingleby.' and the great comedian shook hands with Edwin and hoped he was well.

The atmosphere of the lodgings was very easy and familiar. Bertie Flood, the Mirth-maker of

Three Continents, as the newspapers described him, devoted himself in an easy paternal manner to Rosie. It became apparent to Edwin, overshadowed by the bulk and impressiveness of Mrs Beaucaire, that whenever Mr Flood could make an opportunity of handling Rosie, he did so, and also that Rosie did not in any way resent the process. It even seemed to him that she invited Mr Flood's attentions.

'We're very unconventional people, you know, Dr Ingleby—quite Bohemian,' said Mrs Beaucaire in a thick voice.

Edwin agreed that the relation was delightful. It was only by an effort of concentration that he could hear what the mother was saying. All the time his eyes were on Rosie, so divinely fragile in her white muslin blouse. He shuddered when Bertie Flood touched her. Nothing but the delightful innocence of the girl could have induced her to suffer the presence of this satyr. And yet it seemed to him that she was doing all that she could to please him. . . .

'Yes, my poor husband: the vicar I always call him—habit, you know—had a small parish in the North of England. I have a son in the church too. Both he and Rosie really take after the father.'

'Yes. . . . Exactly,' said Edwin. In that moment Rosie had smiled at him, and the smile was enough. God, what a woman!

'The vicar came from a very old family. In the north it is recognised, but in a place like North Bromwich it is very difficult for us to meet the right sort of people. I have to be very careful for Rosie's sake. The child is so trusting. I was so glad, you know, when she told me that she had

met you at Miss Latham's. One feels so safe with a doctor. You'll be able to look after her a bit . . . see that she don't get too tired. Pantomime is very tiring, you know. I myself suffer agonies from indigestion. What with that and my headaches, I'm afraid I'm a poor companion for her. As I say, both the children take after the dear vicar. Rosie isn't a bit like me.'

'No,' said Edwin, still dazed by the memory of her smile; but, as he spoke, his eyes met those of Mrs Beaucaire, and he saw to his amazement that they were really the eyes of Rosie, that her discoloured nose had once been of the same shape as her daughter's, that the sagging, sensual mouth was in fact a degraded version of Rosie's too. It was a revelation, blasphemous but prophetic. He would not consider it. He dared not look at her.

A moment later Bertie Flood left them. Tea wasn't much in his line, he said, and his complexion confirmed the assertion. Mrs Beaucaire saw him to the door. Edwin and Rosie were alone.

It was a wonderful minute. He felt that she could never seem more beautiful, more delicate, more exquisite than at this moment standing in her pale loveliness against the grimy lodging-house wallpaper, with her hands clasped before her.

'I had to come,' he said.

'I had been expecting you. I'm awfully glad you found time.'

Found time! . . . He wanted to tell her of his strange adventure of the night before: how he had stood in the dripping rain beneath her window, hungry for the sight of her, unsatisfied. She stood as though she would be glad to listen; but there was no time. Mrs Beaucaire, after a noisy and pointed demonstration in the hall, re-entered. It

seemed that there was nothing left for him but to take his departure.

'Surely you're not going so soon?' she said.

And he stayed. It was all delightfully intimate and domestic. These people seemed to possess the rare faculty of putting a visitor as shy as Edwin at his ease. Mrs Beaucaire did most of the talking, enlarging on Rosie's devotion to the parson brother, regretting that circumstance, and possibly the unreasonable prejudice of county people against theatrical connections, had deprived him of the family living: and Rosie listened quietly, more compelling in her demure silences than Mrs Beaucaire at her most impressive.

Once or twice in the afternoon that lady tactfully left them, returning, each time with a renewed vigour and a scent that suggested the combination of eau-de-cologne and brandy. These solitary moments were very precious to Edwin. Neither of them spoke more than a few words, but the air between them seemed charged with emotion. It was six o'clock when he left Prince Albert's Place.

'You won't forget us, will you?' said Mrs Beaucaire with enthusiasm. 'It will be so nice for Rosie to have some one to take her to rehearsal. I don't like her mixing with the boys in the company. It isn't the thing. And we don't happen to have any really nice friends in the Midlands. In the North it would have been quite different.'

A delirious week slipped by. In spite of every resolution Edwin had found it impossible to work. His new lodging was not inspiring; but this was only one of the excuses that he invented to salve his conscience. He knew the real reason for this divine, unreasonable restlessness. Even if it were to wreck his chances in the final examination it

could not be avoided, and there was no reason why it should be excused. He knew that he was in love, and before this unquestionable miracle he abased himself.

Mrs Beaucaire, now satisfied that she could indulge a 'headache' and take to her bed as often as she chose, did not question his presence at Prince Albert's Place: she was even ready on occasion to treat it with a mild facetiousness. Rosie, who lapped up adoration as naturally as a kitten takes to milk, treated it as a matter of course. Edwin rather wished that she wouldn't take as a matter of course the most wonderful thing in the world. There was a passivity in her acquiescence that filled him with a fear that she was used to this sort of thing or even a little bored by it. She mopped up his devotions with an ease that would have been disconcerting if he had not always been bemused by her beauty. Surely it was enough that she should be beautiful!

In the morning—Mrs Beaucaire always had a headache of another kind next day—Edwin would escort Rosie to her rehearsal at the theatre. He became familiar with the frowsty box in which the lame stage-doorkeeper sat like an obscene spider guarding the baize-covered board on which the company's letters were kept. The man came to know him and would pass him in through the swinging doors with a peculiarly evil leer. Sometimes, at the stage door they would become involved in a mass of patchouli-scented chorus, and Edwin would thrill at the dignity and refinement with which Rosie, in her white fox furs, would slip through this vulgar tumult.

So to the stage with its vast cobwebbed walls, its huge echoes and the mysterious darkness of the flies,

where looped ropes and grimy festoons of forgotten scenery hung still as seaweed in a deep sea. There, in the sour and characteristic odour of an empty stage, Edwin would wait for her in a little alcove of the whitewashed wall in which iron cleats were piled, and the unmeaning murmur of the rehearsal would come to him mingled with the shrill voice of the producer, who ended every sentence with the words 'my dear,' or 'old boy,' and the noise of the carpenter hammering wood in the flies. His original acquaintance, Miss Latham, discreetly avoided him, but the comedian, Bertie Flood, seemed inclined to be familiar. One morning he dragged Edwin off to his dressing room for a smoke. He sat with his legs on either side of a chair, his fawn-coloured bowler on the back of his head, looking more than ever like a bookie.

'Well, old boy,' he said, 'how goes it? How's the little Beaucaire?'

'She's all right, as far as I know,' said Edwin, who was inclined to resent the description.

'Ma had any headaches lately? I know what ma's headaches will end in. Cirrhosis of the liver. You're a doctor, aren't you? Well, I know all about that. Had it myself. Just realised in time that it didn't pay. Now I never touch anything but gin. Do you want a word of advice?'

Edwin thanked him.

'May seem funny from a chap that gets two hundred a week for making a damn fool of himself.'

'Not at all,' said Edwin politely.

'Well, if you'll take my advice, you'll go easy in that direction. Treat it as a business proposition. Ma's a bad old woman . . . only don't tell her I said so. You see I'm a friend of the family. Dear

little girl, Rosie, too. *Verbus Satienti*—I always let 'em think I was at Oxford—Good for business.'

It was rather disturbing; for though it was no news to Edwin that Mrs Beaucaire's headaches were euphemistic, the fact had done no more than contribute to the ideal qualities with which he had invested her daughter. There was something romantic as well as pitiful in the idea of Rosie's contrasting innocence: the rose that has its roots in foulness is not less a rose. It had even seemed to him that the complete collapse of Mrs Beaucaire might throw Rosie into his arms: a situation that would be full of romantic and tender possibilities; and the girl's inimitably virginal air was enough to convince him that Bertie Flood's other suggestions were no more than the natural products of a mind degraded by the atmosphere of the music-hall. He was convinced too that he had no cause for jealousy. Ever since he had first visited her, Rosie had never spent more than a few hours of daylight out of his sight.

On the last day of the week before the examination his confidence suffered something of a shock. It was a raw winter morning, but he had set his heart on taking her into his own hill-country, and she, with her usual sweet submission, but without a hint of enthusiasm, had consented. He had planned to avoid the Halesby side of the range and to approach it from the southern escarpment. Early in the morning he paid a visit to Parkinson's, the florist's, in the Arcade, where he bought a bunch of pale, exotic roses: white roses, that should match her own sweetness and fragility. Once she had expressed a general liking for flowers, and since then it had been his delight to give them

to her. She mopped up his flowers and his passion with the same dreamy passivity.

From the corner of the Place he saw a weedy, black-coated figure in front of Number Ten; and as he approached, the figure entered and the door closed behind him. Edwin wondered vaguely if it might be the parson brother. The landlady opened the door in a flurry. It almost seemed as if she wanted to conceal something.

'I don't think Miss Beaucaire can see you for a bit,' she said. 'Won't you call later in the morning?'

He told her that he would wait, as they had an appointment, and a train to catch.

'Then will you kindly wait in my room. You mustn't take any notice of the state it's in,' she said, still on the defensive.

The state of the landlady's room was not inspiriting. On a dirty tablecloth lay the remains of last night's supper. On the window sill stood a chevaux de frise of empty brandy bottles that Edwin couldn't help associating with Mrs Beaucaire. The armchairs, covered with dirty chintz overalls that suggested a layer of more ancient dirt beneath, were not inviting. He preferred to stand. The house was as quiet and secretive as usual; but from the next room he heard an irritating rumour of voices. One of the voices, he could have sworn, was Rosie's. A little later he heard a laugh, and the suspicion became a disquieting certainty, for the laugh was one that he knew well—with a difference. It was as if Mrs Beaucaire had laughed with Rosie's voice. He found it difficult to restrain himself from bursting into the room and settling the matter once and for all. Again the laugh—and then a long silence. He heard steps in the passage, a whispered conversation with the landlady,

and then Rosie came in to him, flushed, and with her fair hair disordered. He could not speak. He only gave her the roses.

'Thank you, Eddie,' she said, scarcely noticing them. Her lips were parted and her eyes shone with excitement. She had never seemed to him more beautiful, but there was something frightening in her beauty.

'Whatever is the matter with you?' she said. 'Why do you look so serious?'

'Who was your visitor?'

'Oh, that's it, is it? You silly boy! You surely don't mean to say you're jealous?'

'Please tell me——'

'It was only a priest. I had to make my confession.'

'A priest? I thought your people belonged to the Church of England.'

'That doesn't prevent me from being a Catholic. It's much better for professional girls to be Catholics. They look after you when you're on the road.'

He could not say any more about it. It seemed to him that her eyes were anxious as though she were not quite sure how much he had heard.

'You believe me, don't you?' She spoke in a frightened whisper.

'Of course I do. We've just time for our train. You *are* coming, aren't you?'

She said: 'Of course I am,' and ran upstairs singing to put her hat on.

The roses lay neglected on the sideboard where she had placed them. In five minutes she returned, thoroughly dressed for her new rôle of country girl with brogued shoes and a short skirt of Harris tweed.

'I'm ready,' she said gaily.

It was a wonderful day. They walked together under dull skies that made the berries in the hedgerows and the waning fires of autumn glow more brightly, and even ministered to the girl's own beauty. The cool air and the walking made her cheeks glow with a colour that was natural and therefore unusual. Edwin was so entranced with her companionship that he forgot his anxiousness of the morning; so lost in the amazing beauty of her hazel eyes and her cheek's soft contour that he did not notice that she was limping. Halfway to the summit of the hills she stopped, gave a little sigh, and sat down on the bank of a hedge.

'I'm awfully sorry, Eddie. My foot hurts. I think this shoe's too tight.'

'They look simply splendid.'

'I know. I only bought them yesterday—just specially for to-day.'

'But it's ridiculous to go for a long walk in new shoes!'

'Do you mind if I take them off for a minute?'

'Of course not. Let me undo the laces.'

He knelt at her feet. It was a wonderful and thrilling experience to loosen the laces, to feel her small feet in their smooth silk stockings. His hands trembled.

'I wish you wouldn't touch my feet. I'm awfully sorry: it's one of the things I can't bear. You don't mind, do you?'

'You mustn't blame me. They're so beautiful.'

She smiled. Her modesty delighted him.

Sitting there together, so miraculously alone, he began to talk about his future. 'I shan't see you for a whole week. It will be unbearable. But when the exam. is over and I'm qualified it will

be such a relief. I shall feel able to say the things that I want to say to you.'

For a long time she was silent. Then she said: 'What are you expecting to do?'

'I think I shall go in for one of the services. What do you think of the Indian Medical? It would be wonderful to see India. I've always thought that I should like to know something of the world. I think it's a good life. Women generally love it. What do you think about it?'

'I should think it would be rather nice. But wouldn't it be awfully hot? I've known one or two boys in the Indian Army. There's lots of dancing and that sort of thing, isn't there?'

He laughed. Dancing wasn't his strong point, as Professor Beagle could have told her, and in any case India didn't mean dancing to him. She did not seem at all anxious to pursue the subject.

'I think we could walk back to the hotel now,' she said. 'I'm simply starving.' They walked down the hill together, almost in silence. When they reached the hotel, she disappeared in the company of the barmaid, leaving Edwin to wait for her in the coffee-room. He almost resented her absence. He felt that he couldn't spare her for a moment. Waiting at the table he picked up a week-old copy of the *North Bromwich Courier*. Gazing idly at the front page, he caught sight of his own name. It was the announcement of a wedding.

INGLEBY : FELLOWS. On the tenth of December, at the Parish Church, Halesby, John Ingleby to Julia, elder daughter of the late Joseph Fellows, of Mawne, Staffs.

He was overwhelmed with a sudden indescribable emotion that was neither jealousy, anger, nor

shame, but curiously near to all three. He sat bewildered, with the paper in front of him. Rosie returned to find him blankly staring.

'Why, what's the matter with you? You look as if you'd seen a ghost.'

'Yes. . . . I think I have. It's nothing, really. Nothing at all.'

He drank more than he need have done of a villainous wine that was labelled *Chateau Margaux*, but had probably been pressed on the hot hillsides of Oran. In the train, on the way home, he felt flushed and sleepy, but, all the time, divinely conscious of the warmth and softness of Rosie sitting beside him They were alone in the first-class carriage. 'I'm sleepy too,' she said. He drew her gently to his side, and she rested, content, with her head on his shoulders. In the wonder of this he forgot the newspaper and its staggering contents. As they neared North Bromwich she stood up in front of the mirror to arrange her hair, and Edwin, pulling himself together, saw that his blue coat was floured with a fine bloom of powder.

She still found it difficult to walk, and so they drove in a hansom to Prince Albert's Place, very grimy and sinister in the dusk.

'You needn't ring,' she said, taking out a latch-key and showing him into the narrow hall. 'Let's be very quiet, so as not to disturb mother.'

'I don't think I'll come in,' he said. He knew that he must make an end somewhere.

'Not even to be thanked? I've enjoyed myself most awfully.'

She stood before him in the gloom of the hall as though she were waiting for something. It felt as if the dark space between them must break into flame. Their lips met.

'Good God! . . . how wonderful you are!' he said.

'Next week,' she whispered.

III

Edwin had arranged to spend the following day with the Boyces at their house in Alvaston. He found it difficult to contain himself, for the delicious memory of their parting the night before swamped his efforts at conversation with the persistency of waves that follow one another in a rising tide. It seemed to him impossible that his state should not be evident to the whole household, and particularly to Matthew, who knew him so well.

In the afternoon, when they sat smoking together in Boyce's study at the top of the house, he felt that he was on the brink of a confession. The only thing that restrained him from it was the memory of the epigram and of his friend's translation. He felt in his bones that Boyce would not be sympathetic and though his infatuation suggested that he wouldn't much care whether Boyce were sympathetic, or suspicious, an intuitive dread of suspicion and its possible effects on his own reason made him hold his tongue. It was in the nature of Boyce, who didn't happen, for the moment, to be in love, to be critical, to sweep away Rosie's perfections in a generalisation: and the appeal of a generalisation to the mind of youth is so strong that Edwin was afraid to hear it. Somewhere in his submerged reason he admitted that Boyce's judgment on the matter would probably be sound, and reason was the last tribunal in the world before which he wished this exceptional case to be presented. An

unsatisfactory day. For the first time in their lives, the relations of the two friends were indefinitely strained.

He left Alvaston early in the evening. On his way to his lodging he passed the gloomy entrance to Prince Albert's Place. It would have been easy, so easy, to call at Number Ten, but he had determined, once and for all, that the examination week should be free from distractions, and pride in his own strength of mind held him to his course, though he realised, almost gladly, that even if he were master of his feet he could not control his thoughts. He wondered if he would dream of her . . .

Next day the rigours of the final examination overtook him. This was the supreme ordeal in which every moment of his professional life from the day when he first entered the dissecting room to the night of the last midwifery case, would stand the test of scrutiny. He was not exactly afraid of it. He knew that his knowledge and technical skill were at least above the average of his year, and felt that with ordinary luck he would be among the first four of a field of twelve. The year was not one of exceptional brilliance, and comparisons were therefore in his favour.

On the first day, in the *viva-voce* examination on surgery, he did, for one moment, lose his head, but when once he had pulled himself together and accustomed himself to the conditions of the test, he settled down into a state of fatalistic equanimity, taking the rough with the smooth and deciding that, on the whole, he was not likely to make a hopeless fool of himself.

On the first night he went to bed early, but on the second, feeling that his mind would be clearer for some diversion, he went to a music-hall with

W.G. and his wife. Drinking beer in the bar with his friend, he suddenly heard his name called, and felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned to find himself in front of a face that was curiously familiar, and in a moment found that he was shaking hands with Widdup, a small and rather chastened Widdup, who spoke to him with the slow, precise voice that he had known at St Luke's.

'I thought it was you, Ingleby,' he said. 'I wondered if I should run across you.'

Avoiding a hair-raising display on the slack wire, they stood talking. Widdup, it appeared, had been destined for an engineering career in North Bromwich, when his mathematical genius had won him a scholarship at Cambridge.

'A pity, in a way, for I should have seen more of you. I suppose that sort of thing always happens to school friendships.' At present he was visiting a firm of iron-founders on business. They talked together of old times: of the day when Edwin, greatly daring, had seen the Birches run: of the languid Selby, now head-master of a small public-school in Norfolk, and of old fat Leeming. Between the conscious effort of remembering St Luke's and the unbidden image of Rosie, Edwin's head was in a whirl.

'And old Griffin,' said Widdup. 'That's another funny thing. I ran slap into him in the lounge of the Grand Midland to-night. Up to the same old games, you know. Yes . . . he had a girl with him. Rather an attractive little piece: something to do with the pantomime, he told me. What was her name? The old brute introduced me, too! Yes . . . I think I've got it. Beaucaire. . . . Rosie Beaucaire. Rather a rosy prospect for old

Griff, I should imagine. Why, what the devil's the matter with you?'

'I'm all right, thanks,' said Edwin. 'It's this exam, you know. Let's have another drink.' He called for whisky and soda.

'Chin-chin,' said Widdup.

Edwin polished off a couple of drinks and then told Widdup that he must rejoin his friend, leaving him staggered at his abrupt departure. He didn't rejoin W.G. He walked straight out of the theatre and off up the Halesby Road. He had determined to go straight to Rosie's lodgings and thrash the matter out; but by the time he reached Prince Albert's Place he had thought better of it.

It was the most natural thing in the world, he reflected, that Griffin should know the Beaucaires, for Griffin was constantly in touch with theatrical people. It was even natural that Griffin, knowing her, should take Rosie to the Grand Midland. It was the obvious thing to do if you had money to spend, as Griffin had. It would be just like the irony of fate, he reflected, if Griffin should afflict him with unhappiness in this case as he had done in so many others. He remembered the bitter sufferings of those early days at St Luke's that Widdup had so clearly recalled. He remembered Dorothy Powys and the dance at Mawne: his suspicions, his agonised resentment. Even more darkly there came to him the memory of a voice in Dr Harris's surgery, a conviction, never yet established, that Griffin had no right to know any woman. This reflection, he knew, implied a doubt of Rosie's innocence: an imputation that he could not possibly admit. And yet . . . and yet . . . He remembered the warning that Bertie Flood had

given him in his dressing room. He remembered the visitor in the black coat four days before. His mind was in hell.

In this purgatory of doubt and horror, he lived for the rest of the week. In the daytime the progress of the examination engrossed him, but at night he always found himself hanging about the darkness of Prince Albert's Place, hoping against hope, that his suspicions were unfounded, not daring to put them to the test, lest they should be confirmed.

On Friday night, when the last of his medical ordeals was over, he went straight to Number Ten. It was a wonderful moment. Now, with a clear conscience he might see her again; now, once more, he could know the ecstasy of her kisses and forget the ungenerous nightmare in which he had lived through the later stages of the exam. He approached the dirty doorway with his heart beating wildly. At first his ring was unanswered, but a little later the landlady came to the door with a red, suspicious face, opening it jealously, as though she feared to let him in.

He inquired for Miss Beaucaire. Miss Beaucaire was out. Did the woman know when she was expected to return? She hadn't the least idea. Was Mrs Beaucaire in, then? Mrs Beaucaire was in, but invisible. Mrs Beaucaire had one of her headaches. Edwin suggested that he should wait in their room. Impossible. Mrs Beaucaire was lying down there. He hung upon the doorstep as if he were waiting at the gates of paradise. At last the landlady took it upon herself to close the door. She must have thought he was mad. Perhaps he was mad. . . .

For an hour or more he waited in the rain. It

occurred to him that at least the woman was speaking the truth, for there was no light in either of the front rooms. The Grand Midland. . . . It was there that Widdup had seen them. He walked to Sackville Row at a great pace and straight into the hotel, where waiters and elderly commercial gentlemen stared at his wet clothes and his haggard face. He went into each of the dining-rooms and down the stairs to the Turkish lounge. Nowhere was Rosie or Griffin to be seen. A search of this kind was ridiculous, but every moment that the agony was extended made him more desperately anxious.

He walked back in the drizzle to Prince Albert's Place and paced the pavement under the black walls of the warehouses. The road was deserted. There was no sound in it at all but the dripping of water from some neglected spout. He walked up and down in the shadow, and as he walked he became conscious of something like a personality in the faces of the long row of lodging-houses, something sinister, as though their shuttered windows concealed a wealth of obscene experience like the eyes of ancient street-walkers. The souls of those squat Victorian houses were languidly interested in him. Another victim. . . . That was what he must seem to them. And still the windows of Number Ten were unlighted.

He heard the clock in the Art Gallery chime eleven: a leisurely, placid chime muffled by gusty rain. Perhaps the woman had lied to him. Perhaps, at that very moment Rosie was sleeping peacefully in the unlighted upper story. He was overwrought with the strain of the examination on the top of this devastating passion. He had better go home.

He turned to go, and at that very moment he saw two figures approaching from the Halesby

Road. The street lamp, at the corner, threw their shadows on the shining pavement. One of them was Rosie—he would have known her anywhere —and the other, beyond doubt, was Griffin. He was seized with the same blind passion that had swept over him in the big schoolroom at St Luke's ten years before, an impulse to murder that he could only control by digging his finger nails into his hands.

He stood there trembling in the shadow of the blank wall, huddling close to it for support and for protection. They passed him, and he heard Rosie's quiet laugh. Her laugh was one of the things about her that he had loved most. They stopped at the door, and Rosie took out her latch-key. It was almost a repetition of the scene in which he had shared a week before. Now, perhaps, she would kiss him. He felt that if he saw her kissing Griffin he could have killed them both. Murderer's Cross Road. . . . A hundred thoughts came swirling through his brain. They entered, and closed the door behind them. Griffin: the old Griffin: the human beast of St Luke's. The new Griffin: the gross North Bromwich womaniser: the Griffin of Dr Harris's surgery. . . . Edwin saw himself upon the edge of a ghastly, unthinkable tragedy. He must prevent it. At all costs. At the cost of life if needs be.

He crept quickly across the road. The houses watched him. The window of the lower room bloomed suddenly with a yellow light. He stood with his hands clutching the window-sill, listening. Once again he heard Rosie's laugh, and a rumour of deeper speech that he knew to be the voice of Griffin. The shadow of Griffin's shoulders swept the window, swelling gigantically as it passed.

The light was turned down, but not extinguished. Rosie's laugh again. He could have killed her for that laugh, for it mocked him. The faint shadow of the man's shoulders retreated. He guessed that they were standing at the door. The door of the room closed softly. Now there was no sound except the heavy breathing that one hears in the neighbourhood of a pigsty at night. Was Griffin still there?

Another beam of light fell on the shining street. Some one had lighted the gas in the room upstairs. Was Griffin still below? Panic seized him. He must know. At all costs he must know. Dr Harris's surgery. . . . If he had to break in the front door he must know. As he reached it he tripped over an iron boot-scraper. The step barked his shin. Of course the door was locked, but—wonder of wonders—Rosie had left the latchkey outside. He opened the door softly and went on tip-toe into the hall. In the room on the right he still heard the grunting noise. Thank God Griffin was still there! At least he could tell him that he knew!

He opened the door. In the half-light he could see that the room was empty except for Mrs Beaucaire, who lay stretched on the sofa, snoring heavily with her vile mouth open. On the table stood an empty brandy bottle. The place stank of brandy.

Now he knew the worst. He stumbled upstairs in the dark and knocked frantically at the door of the front bedroom. Rosie answered: 'Who is it?'

'It's I. For God's sake let me in.'

'Who the devil is it?' said the voice of Dr Harris's consulting-room.

Rosie answered him in excited whispers.

'You can't come in, Eddie,' she said. 'How on earth did you get into the house? Please go away. I can't see you. I can't, really.'

'I'm coming in, I tell you. If you don't open the door, I'll smash it. I mean what I say.'

'Ingleby——?' the voice muttered. 'What the devil has Ingleby to do with you? All right. I'll go. I'll chuck the fellow downstairs.'

'Oh, don't . . . please don't. . . . Let him go quietly.'

Griffin unlocked the door. He stood facing Edwin in his shirt-sleeves. Rosie, still dressed, clutched at the mantelpiece. The vein in the middle of Griffin's forehead bulged with anger. His short neck was flushed.

'What the hell——' he began—and then they closed. Edwin's heel ripped up the corner of the carpet as they swayed together. Suddenly Griffin's grip slackened. His face blanched, and in a moment Edwin was letting down a sheer weight upon the bed.

'What's the matter?' Rosie screamed, and flung herself beside him. 'What's the matter?'

'Good God! . . . He's gone.'

'No . . . No——' she cried.

Edwin tore open Griffin's shirt, listening for an impulse that was not there.

'He's gone,' he said, panting. 'He's dead. . . . Heart. . . . He always had a rocky heart. He's dead.'

The awful word seemed to pull Rosie together. They stared at each other blankly with wide eyes.

'Are you sure?' she whispered.

'Yes. . . . Of course——'

She rose to her feet, speaking in a voice that was quite new to him.

'Eddie . . . for God's sake, go . . . now! . . . quickly!'

'I can't go.'

'Go quickly, I tell you. Don't be a damned little fool. You don't want to be mixed up in this. Eddie, for God's sake. . . . It's "natural causes," Eddie.'

He blundered down the dark stairs and out into the street. He could not walk. He cowered under the warehouse wall opposite, gazing, as though fascinated, at the yellow square of window. The discreet Victorian houses surveyed him as if the horror that the yellow blind concealed were an ordinary occurrence in their dingy lives. They were used to death. And death did not change them. A rubber-tyred hansom rolled smoothly up the Halesby Road, past the mouth of the Place. At the corner, under the gas-lamp, Edwin saw the figure of a policeman with rain shining on his cape. The sight recalled him to a sense of awful possibilities. For the moment he dared not move. He flattened himself against the warehouse walls and did not realise that he was standing directly under the dripping waterspout. In the western sky rose the baleful glare of an uncowled furnace. The policeman strolled away, and Edwin, cautiously emerging, set off through the rain up the Halesby Road towards the hills. He felt that he needed their solitude and darkness.

IV

Next day, a haggard and desolate figure, he appeared in the cloak-room of the University where the examination results were displayed. In a

dream he realised that he was now a Bachelor of Medicine, but in the realisation there was none of the joy that he had anticipated. He stood before the board bewildered, until W.G. came up behind him and wrung his hand.

'You look as if you'd been making a night of it, my boy,' he said. 'Come and have some coffee at the Dousita.'

W.G. was on the top of himself. 'It was a pretty near thing. The external examiner in Medicine gave me hell; but it's all right. God! . . . it's difficult to believe, isn't it? What are you going to do?'

'I don't know. A voyage, I should think.'

He hadn't thought of it before.

'That's not a bad idea. Bit of a rest cure, eh? That's the only disadvantage, I don't mind telling you, of being married. I couldn't leave the missus.'

W.G. babbled on happily. 'Did you see the evening paper?' he said. 'I see that fellow Griffin's done for. I always said he'd come to a nasty, sticky end. Some woman or other. . . . I remember your saying that he couldn't play footer because of his heart. Ah, well . . . that's one swine the less, poor devil!'

When W.G. left him, Edwin called for a time-table and looked out the trains to Liverpool. There was one that started in half an hour. He caught it, and next morning presented himself at a shipping office in Water Street.

The medical superintendent received him.

'You want a ship? Well, you know, you look very young. When were you qualified?'

'Yesterday,' Edwin confessed.

'Very young. Still, you won't be stale. You don't *drink*, by any chance?'

'I'm practically a total abstainer.' The man scrutinised Edwin's haggard eyes.

'H'm. . . Well, as it happens, one of our men has failed us. I'll give you a ship, the *Macao*, if you can sail to-morrow. Rather short notice, eh?'

'I think I can do it. What about equipment?'

'Oh, we don't go in for brass-bound uniforms on our ships. Ten pounds a month and bonus. What?'

'Where is she going to?'

'China. You may call at Japan for coal with luck. See the world, you know. That's what most of you fellows are after. You'll have to go aboard to-night. Birkenhead Docks.'

'I'll be there.'

And with trembling hands he signed his contract.

In a wintry evening he crossed the Mersey ferry. A salt wind from the west boomed up the channel. Edwin, in the bows, felt his face drenched with spray. 'It's clean,' he thought. 'It will make me cleaner. That's what I need. I don't believe I shall ever feel anything again, until I'm washed clean. I'm old . . . old and numb. I've lost my sense of enjoyment. I wonder if it will ever come back to me!'

As he stood there in the salt breeze, some words of Traherne, his mother's countryman, came into his mind:

'You shall never enjoy this world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars.'

Perhaps they were true. He wondered.

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